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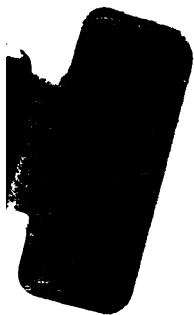
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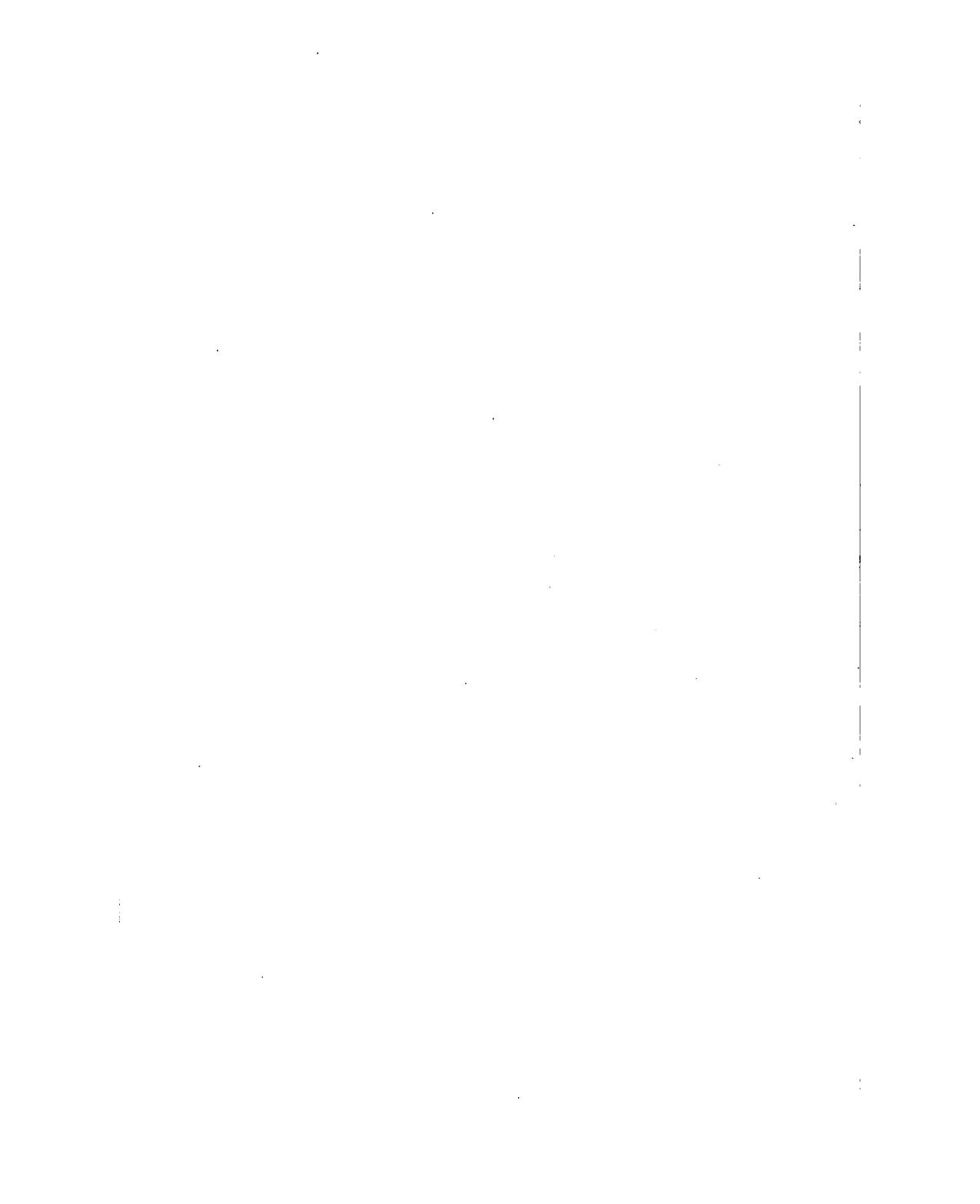


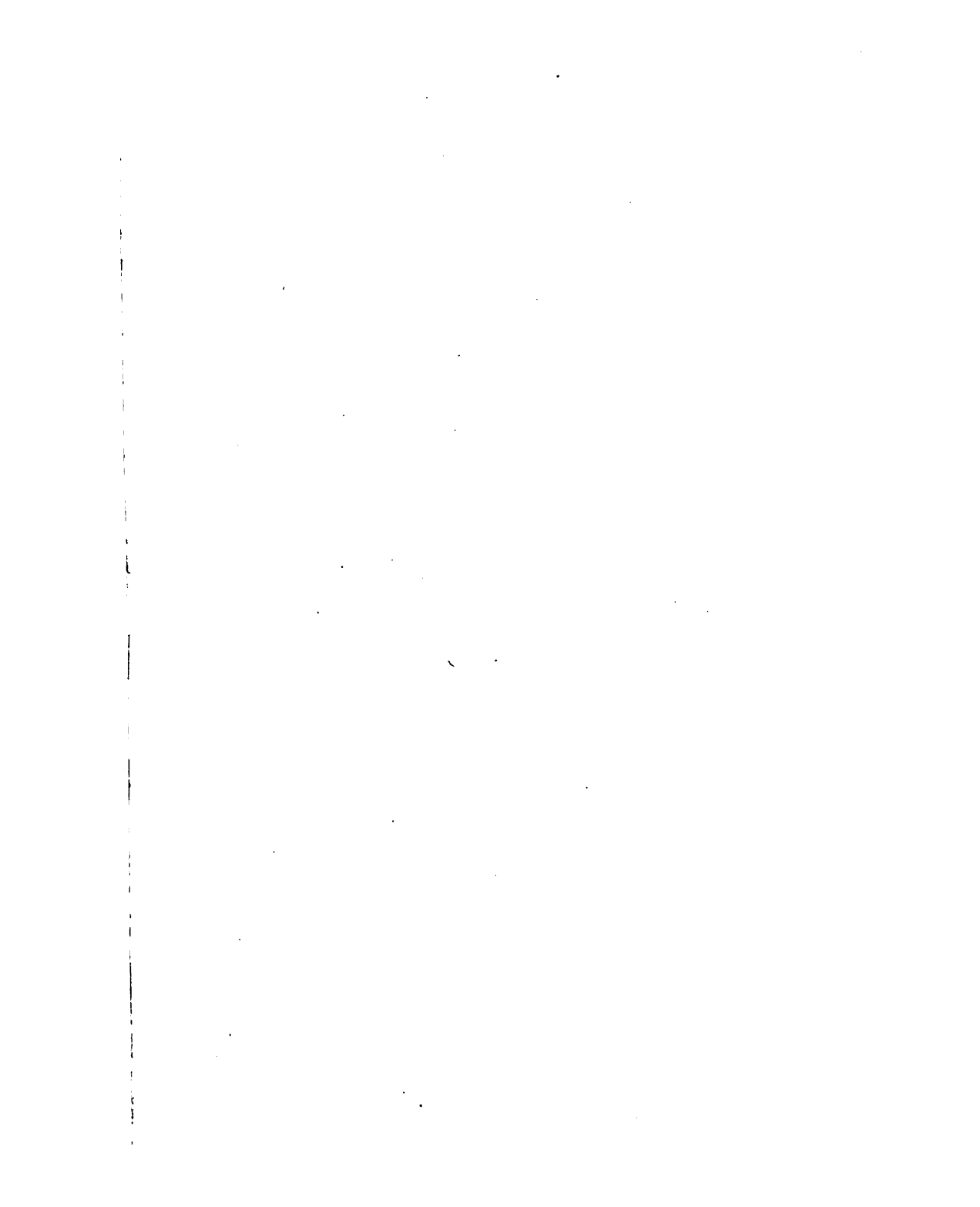




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THE LOVE OF BOOKS AND READING

BY

OSCAR KUHNS

Author of

"THE GERMAN AND SWISS SETTLEMENTS OF COLONIAL PENNSYLVANIA:
A STUDY OF THE SO-CALLED PENNSYLVANIA DUTCH,"
"THE SENSE OF THE INFINITE," ETC.



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TO THE MEMORY OF
MY BROTHERS
GEORGE WASHINGTON KUHNS
AND
WALTER BROWN KUHNS

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THE LOVE OF BOOKS AND READING

CHAPTER I.

THE ART OF READING, PAST AND PRESENT

THE habit of reading is so universal to-day, it seems so natural and necessary a part of our intellectual life, that it is hard to realize that there was a time when it was unknown. Of course, the art of reading could not exist before the invention of written language, an invention which seemed so marvellous in the eyes of primitive man that it is no wonder that the Greeks apotheosized Cadmus, that Egyptian hieroglyphics were held sacred, and that the Gothic runes were used in prophecy and religion.¹ There was

¹ Lord Bacon has a magnificent eulogy on the invention of letters in his *Advancement of Learning*: "So that if

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something mysterious about these strange figures which could communicate thought, and a sacred character was early attributed by all races to the written word; to this day the Chinese regard as a sacrilege the destruction of even scraps of printed paper, otherwise than by the purifying action of fire.

It is undoubtedly due to this innate reverence for the letter in a strictly literal sense, that certain formulas, or combinations of words, have always been regarded as having peculiar power, not only in religious worship, but in what has been variously called white magic, pow-wowing, or *Beschwörungsformeln*. This is a superstition which by no means is peculiar to the distant past alone, but which we find exemplified in all ages, from the time

the invention of the ship was thought so noble, which carrieth riches and commodities from place to place and consociateth the most remote regions in participation of their fruits, how much more are letters to be magnified, which as ships pass through the vast seas of time, and make ages so distant to participate of the wisdom, illuminations, and inventions, the one of the other?"

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when "Circe burnt her fragrant fires and sang her magic songs as she wove at the immortal loom," down through the *sortes Virgilianae* of the Middle Ages, the Cabbala of the Renaissance, the *Bibel-los* of German Pietists, to the Christian Science of to-day, when the reading or repeating of passages from Mrs. Eddy's *Science and Health* is supposed to have a healing effect. Even mottoes and quotations owe something of their charm to this same influence. Nay, the sacred books of the East, the Bible as the literal word of God, the use of Latin in the services of the Roman Church, are all probably more or less influenced by this atavistic reverence for the written word.

In the earliest ages, long after written language was invented, reading as we understand it now, was not known. Even after the Homeric poems were reduced to writing, they were chiefly brought to the knowledge

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of the people by the Rhapsodes, or public reciters; and this phenomenon was repeated during the Dark Ages by Minnesinger and Troubadour, who went from castle to castle, or stood in the public squares, singing the songs of King Arthur and Charlemagne, making their numbers flow,

For old unhappy, far-off things,
Or battles long ago.

It was only later, and especially after the invention of printing, that the mediaeval epics were actually read by the general public.

Yet reading, though infinitely less widely spread than to-day, became a veritable passion among certain Greeks and Romans. Horace tells his readers to turn over and over again the pages of the Greek writers; Cicero declares that reading, *Emollit mores nec sinit esse feros*,¹ while we shall see later with what

¹ Softens our manners, and does not allow us to become wild.

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enthusiasm, and at the same time remorse, the early Christian Fathers plunged into the reading of the great classics. Reading had become such a passion with the Romans that we hear, from time to time a warning voice, even as in later times. Thus Seneca says, "the reading of many authors and the greatest variety of books produces a vague and unsteady state of mind. We must linger over the great writers and get nourishment from them. Even in study, which is the noblest occupation of man, we must go about it in a common-sense way and be reasonable."

Like so many other things, during the long night of the Dark Ages, the ability to read was well-nigh lost. Learning practically died out, Greek was unknown, scholars were few and far between, and only a small number of those outside the Church could read; while the reading of the clergy themselves was largely confined to the breviary, lives of the

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saints and collections of *exempla*. Profane indigenous literature was almost entirely a matter of oral recital.

As in so many other respects, so in the love for reading we see a new life springing up during the period of the Renaissance. With the discovery of the ancient classics, a vast enthusiasm for books and reading took possession of men. Chief among these is Petrarch, whose services in the discovery of new manuscripts, in copying rare books, and in the formation of libraries, can hardly be overestimated. Petrarch is the consummate type of the passionate lover of books, the great apostle of the modern reader. A small sized volume could be compiled of all the notable things he has said of books and reading. From his earliest youth he was an incessant reader, and this passion grew and developed as the years went on. He read not merely from curiosity; as he himself says,

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"I do not read to cultivate my intellect, or to become more eloquent; but to make myself a better man." His passion for books was unquenchable; "*Libris satiari nequeo*," he says. It became almost a disease. "Gold, silver, marble palaces, fields, horses, delight me but little. Books only give us true and substantial satisfaction; they speak to us, counsel us and enter with us in harmonious and ultimate familiarity. It is not enough to gather books for vanity, to fill our library, and embellish our house. It is not enough to possess our books, we must know them; not to arrange them on the shelves of our library, but to make them a part and parcel of our memory and our intellects."

His love for books increased with age. A year before his death he says, "I study indefatigably, and from my studies I have never received greater delight than now. While in every other respect I feel the in-

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firmities of old age, in my studies it seems to me that I grow younger every day. Therefore I shall be glad if death shall come upon me while I shall be engaged in reading or writing, or if God will, in praying." It is pleasant to add, that death did indeed surprise him bending over a book in his library.

It is not perhaps inappropriate to linger thus much over Petrarch, the most famous of all modern readers. Extensive quotations could be made of similar import from other great men of the Renaissance. The Humanists as a class were lovers of books, from Poggio Bracciolini, the follower of Petrarch, to Erasmus, who was known to go without his dinner in order to save the money to buy Greek books.

A famous lover of books, almost equal to Petrarch is Montaigne, although he is not so enthusiastic or passionate. He may be taken as the type of a rational user of books, ready

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to drop them when they threaten to become harmful. He tells us how he regards the commerce of books as more useful than that of men or women, how they console him in old age and solitude, relieve him from the weight of a wearisome idleness, and dull the edge of pain; "pour me distraire d'une imagination importune," he says, "il n'est que de recouvrir aux livres." He never travels without books, for it is a comfort to think they are always at his side, to give him pleasure when he wants them; "c'est la meilleure munition que j'aye trouvée à cet humain voyage."

Yet here, as in all things else, Montaigne avoids all extravagance. Books are pleasant, he says, but if from using them too much we lose our cheerfulness and health, two of the best things we have, let us quit them; "for I am among those who think that their fruit cannot counterbalance this loss." And so he

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tells us of his leisurely method of reading, turning over the pages now of this book, now of that, without order or design, "*à pièces descousues*," sometimes dreaming, sometimes taking notes, and sometimes dictating, as he walks, "*mes songes que voici*." Like those of all men, his motives for reading changed as he grew older; when young he studied for ostentation; later to make himself wise; "*à cette heure pour m'esbattre; jamais pour le quest*."

Other famous readers were John Milton, who from his earliest youth was seized with such eagerness for learning that as he himself says, "from the twelfth year of my age, I scarce ever went to bed before midnight;" who read not as a theologian, but as a poet and scholar, and always in the light of his secret purpose; and for whom, as for Dom Rivet, reading was not an idle curiosity, but a serious occupation consecrated by religion; Montesquieu, who found comfort in all

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conditions of life in books, and who says "study has been for me the sovereign remedy against all the disappointments of life, and I have never had any sorrow that an hour's reading could not dissipate;" Gladstone, for whom "reading in the days of his full vigor was an habitual communion with the master-spirits of mankind as a vivifying and nourishing part of life." In some this love for reading has assumed a veritable mystical form, as in the case of Amiel, when he first went to the university of Berlin, and who tells us of the impression of august serenity which enwrapped him, when rising before the dawn and lighting his study lamp, he came to his desk as to an altar, reading, meditating, seeing before his "*pensée recueillie*," the centuries pass, space unroll itself, and the Absolute hovering above him.

Time would fail us to mention men who from earliest childhood have been filled with

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this strange passion for books,—even those who are of our own tongue and age. Everybody knows the group of book lovers in England during the early part of the nineteenth century,—Coleridge, the lonely dreamy lad, loving above all things knowledge, and who in school was found to be reading Vergil for his own amusement; Leigh Hunt, Hazlitt and Lamb, the latter of whom, according to Crabb Robinson, “possessed the finest collection of shabby books I ever saw.” Among the great readers of the nineteenth century none are more interesting than three men, Shelley, Macaulay and Emerson. Of Shelley it was said, that no student at Oxford ever read more ardently than he. “He was to be found, book in hand, at all hours; reading in season and out of season, at table, in bed, and especially during a walk, not only in the quiet country, and in retired paths, not only at Oxford, in the public walks

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and High street, but in the most crowded thoroughfares of London." "I never saw eyes," says Hogg, "that devoured the pages more voraciously than his; I am convinced that two-thirds of the period of day and night were employed in reading. It is no exaggeration to affirm that out of the twenty-four hours, he frequently read sixteen."

Emerson's reading was not so wide-spread as Shelley's, it ran very largely in the line of the transcendental and the mystical,—Shakspeare, Plato, Plotinus, Epictetus, Thomas à Kempis, Saadi and the Persian poets. Yet from his earliest youth he lived in an atmosphere of letters,—“books were meat and drink to him.” No man has ever uttered nobler words in praise of books and reading and their power to uplift than he. “In sickness, in languor, give us a strain of poetry, or a profound sentence, and we are refreshed; or produce a volume of Shakspeare

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or Plato, or remind us of their names, and instantly we come into a feeling of longevity." "Let us not forget the genial miraculous force we have known to proceed from a book. We go musing into the vault of day and night; no constellation shines, no muse descends, the stars are white points, the roses brick-colored dust, mice peep and wagons creep along the road. We return to the house and take up Plutarch or Augustine, and read a few sentences or pages and lo! the air swims with life; the front of heaven is full of fiery shapes; secrets of magnanimity and grandeur invite us on every hand; life is made up of them; such is our debt to a book."

Yet perhaps the most enthusiastic devotee of reading and books of modern times, worthy of a place beside Petrarch himself, was Lord Macaulay. Even in school, says his biographer,¹ in spite of time necessarily

¹ Trevelyan.

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spent on his classics, or mathematics, he found time to gratify that insatiable thirst for European literature, which he retained throughout life. All through his life he retained his omnivorous and insatiable appetite for books, and a large part of that life was spent in extensive and diversified reading. More and more as the years went on, he shut himself up among his books, and established a deep personal relation with them. He cared little for modern books, but he loved to read over and over again the books he loved from his youth up, of which he had by heart "every incident, and almost every sentence."

"Of the feelings which he entertained towards the great minds of by-gone ages, it is not for anyone but himself to speak. He has told us how his debt to them was incalculable; how they guided him to truth; how they filled his mind with noble and graceful

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images; how they stood by him in all vicissitudes, comforters in sorrow, nurses in sickness, companions in solitude, 'the old friends who are never seen with new faces; who are the same in wealth and in poverty, in glory and in obscurity.' The confidence with which he could rely upon intellectual pursuits for occupation and amusement, assisted him not a little to preserve that dignified composure with which he met his public career, and that spirit of cheerful and patient endurance which sustained him through the years of broken health and enforced seclusion. He had no pressing need to seek for excitement and applause abroad, when he had beneath his own roof a never-failing store of exquisite enjoyment. That invincible love for reading, which Gibbon declared he would not exchange for the treasure of India, was with Macaulay, a main element of happiness in one of the happiest lives that it

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has ever fallen to the lot of a biographer to record." ¹

¹ Some idea of the quality of Macaulay's reading may be obtained from the following list of books he read in little over a year: "During the last thirteen months," he says in a letter, "I have read Æschylus twice, Sophocles twice, Euripides twice, Pindar twice, Callimachus, Apollonius Rhodius, Quintus Calaber, Theocritus twice, Herodotus and Thucydides, almost all of Xenophon's works, almost all of Plato; Aristotle's *Politics* and a good deal of his *Organon*, besides dipping elsewhere in him; the whole of Plutarch's *Lives*, about half of Lucian, two or three books of Athenæus, Plautus twice, Terence once, Lucretius twice, Catullus, Tibullus, Propertius; Lucan, Statius, Silius Italicus, Livy, Velleius Paterculus, Sallust, Cæsar, and lastly Cicero." All this reading was done while he was in India. In another letter he tells what he read on the voyage thither: "I read insatiably; the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, Virgil, Horace, Cæsar's *Commentaries*, Bacon's *De Augmentis*, Dante, Petrarch, Ariosto, Tasso, *Don Quixote*, Gibbons' *Rome*, Mill's *India*, all the seventy volumes of Voltaire, Sismondi's *History of France*, and the seven thick volumes of the *Biographia Britannica*."

CHAPTER II

READING FOR WRITING AND INVESTIGATION

To-day there is hardly any phase of modern life so widely spread as the habit of reading. The invention of printing, the more recent devices of linotype, the enormous printing presses, the letting down of national barriers, the universality of schools, has brought about a vast increase in the number of those able to read, has awakened curiosity, and has consequently led to an almost countless number of magazines, newspapers, short stories, novels, books of travel and other forms of so-called "popular literature." The present century is essentially a reading one; some would say with Croiset, speaking of the Alexandrian school, "*le mal de cette génération est le trop de littérature.*"

Many people look on reading as a virtue

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in and for itself; yet in many cases it may be only the indication of a lazy disposition. To spend hours over illustrated magazines, Sunday newspapers, and the majority of popular novels, has very little to do with the art of reading in its larger sense. The true readers have always been few in number and are probably not more numerous in proportion now than they have been in the past, in spite of the vast output of ephemeral literature and the consequent consumption thereof.

To profit by what we read we must use judgment in the selection of books; we must use them not merely for passing amusement or indulgence in idle or morbid curiosity, nor in scanning

the festering news we half despise,
Yet scramble for no less.

We should look on books and reading as a powerful instrument in forming character "for giving us men and women armed with

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reason, braced by knowledge, clothed with steadfastness and courage, and inspired by that public spirit and public virtue which are the brightest ornaments of the mind of men."¹

The mere reading of many books is no more of lasting value than the casual visit to the famous galleries of Europe; unless indeed, we have the spirit of Schopenhauer, who frequented the galleries of Dresden chiefly "to learn the revelation they might have to give of the meaning of life, and the worth of things." In all times there have been men who have read much without profit, from the days of the Rhapsodes, who were "particular about the exact words of Homer,

¹ Cf. Epictetus: "Do you think I shall call you industrious because you pass your nights in studying and reading? By no means. I must know what is the object of all this study. If you are working for glory, I call you ambitious. If you are working for money I call you avaricious. But if you study in order to cultivate and form your reason, to accustom yourself to obey the laws of nature, to fulfil your duties, then only I call you industrious; for that is the only labor worthy of a man."

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but very foolish in themselves,"—down to the modern pedant. For it is a law that applies to all times that he

"Who reads

Incessantly, and to his reading brings not
A spirit and judgment equal or superior,
Uncertain and unsettled still remains,
Deep versed in books and shallow in himself."

This higher kind of reading has been beautifully described by Thoreau: "Of reading as a noble intellectual exercise they know little or nothing; yet this only is reading in a high sense, not that which lulls us as a luxury or suffers the nobler faculty to sleep the while; but what we have to stand on tip-toe to read, and devote our most alert and wakeful hours to. There are the stars and those who can may read them." Some indeed may think this a waste of time, "C'est une vaine estude qui veult, mais qui veult, aussi, c'est une de fruit inestimable."

This kind of reading is not easy. It re-

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quires long years of preparation, "a training such as the athletes underwent, the steady intention almost of the whole life to the subject." It is not the mere recreation of an idle hour, but the serious business of a man's life. It is often fraught with discouragement; in the midst of the vast multitudes of books, we feel from time to time a sense of being crushed. And yet these moods pass away. In very self-defense we must find some way of harmonizing our love for reading, our thirst for knowledge, with a sense of reason and utility. And we find this not in the multitude of facts, in text criticism, local history, manners and customs, grammatical details, although all these also have their place, but rather in the undeniable fact that books as well as nature, religion and the various experiences of life, are a mighty influence in developing intellectual and spiritual character.

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Many are the motives which lead men to read,¹ and many are the functions performed by books. In the first place they afford a pleasant change, and give us rest for the body and mind. In hours of weariness when we need relaxation, an interesting novel may be of genuine value. It is well-known how Carlyle, in his despair at the burning of the manuscript of his *French Revolution*, found relief alone in reading cheap novels. A higher form of this phase of our subject is the comfort, peace and solace that often comes from reading. Humboldt said that even on his dying bed a line of Homer would bring him peace; and Longfellow in his terrible grief over the tragic death of his wife,

¹ Cf. Lord Bacon, *Advancement of Learning*: "For men have entered into a desire of learning and knowledge, sometimes upon a natural curiosity and inquisitive appetite; sometimes to entertain their minds with variety and delight; sometimes for ornament and reputation; and sometimes to enable them to victory of wit and contradiction; and most times for lucre and profession; and seldom sincerely to give a true account of their gift of reason, to the benefit and use of men."

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found comfort in pouring over the pages of
Dante's *Divina Commedia*:

So as I enter here from day to day,
And lay my burden at this minster gate,
Kneeling in prayer and not ashamed to pray,
The tumult of the time disconsolate,
To inarticulate murmurs dies away,
While the eternal ages watch and wait.

Another almost universal motive for reading is the acquisition of information, whether of a technical, scientific or literary nature. At the present day, it is probable that more books are read for these two purposes, amusement and information, than for any other. And clearly connected with them, is the spirit of investigation, and what we may call reading for writing. For the present day is not only conspicuous for its universal habit of reading, but also for the vast increase in the number of writers. It is the easiest thing in the world nowadays, to write

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and publish a pamphlet or book; and no desire is more wide-spread than the *cacoethes scribendi*. The great success, in a monetary way, of the popular novels has led to the rise of a whole army of novelists; and the incessant demand for short stories, descriptive and other sketches in magazines, has added its influence to swell the number of authors.¹

Not only in the field of fiction is the output of books constantly increasing, but also in the field of scholarship as well. The spread of German university ideals in this country, the increasing number of those who take a Doctor's degree, with its concomitant thesis, has increased enormously the number of young writers. Now, all writing must be preceded by some study; and this is valuable in that it tends to fix and direct our reading.

But it may be doubted whether the present

¹ Most of these writers are young men and women. It is interesting to note how soon the bloom-period of novel and story writing passes away in any one individual. Only a few veterans continue to the end.

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system of hasty publication has not done as much harm as good; and whether, after all, Hegel is not right when speaking of Pythagoras's method of condemning his pupils to silence for five years, he says, "in a sense this duty of silence is the essential condition of all culture and learning. True culture must begin with resolute self-effacement, with a purely receptive attitude."

In recent years, not only has so-called investigation come into very great prominence in our colleges and universities, but it has brought forth a storm of protest in many directions. Ferdinand Brunetière has arraigned, in most contemptuous language, the "investigation" of mediaeval literature, attempting to show the utter uselessness of the vast majority of such studies.¹ In our own

¹ Cf. the lines of Carl Spitteler:
In Rom, Ferrara, Sanct Onofrio,
Fahn' sie nach Briefen, schmökern sie nach Quellen.
Doch führt sie vor des Meisters schönste Stellen,
So möckern sie: Warum? Wozu? Wieso?

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country many articles on the same line have appeared in prominent journals and elsewhere.

It would seem from these criticisms that pedantry was some new excrescence on modern civilization. And yet pedantry, like all other purely human traits, is as old as history itself. The same language of contempt and ridicule cast to-day upon the dry useless pedant is found among the Greeks and Romans, and during the Renaissance. The accusation of triviality, vanity, irrelevancy, and aloofness from life, occurs over and over again. Says Socrates speaking of Euthydemus and the Sophist: "And if a man had all that sort of knowledge that ever was he would not be at all the wiser; he would be able to play with men, tripping them up and oversetting them with distinction of words; like someone pulling away a stool under some one about to sit down." This kind of pedantry reached its

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high-water mark, in antiquity, in the Alexandrian School, and together with the virtuosity of poetry during that period, is usually looked upon as a symptom of the decadence of Greek intellectual life. A large number of scholars read, imitated, commented, compiled, shut up among their books, and reading only them,—and producing as a result of their investigations “a labor useful without doubt,—meritorious even, in many respects, but after all, common-place, mediocre, impersonal.”¹ We naturally find the same pedantry in the Roman imitators of the Alexandrians and the same criticism. Says Seneca: “It is no benefit to discuss whether

¹ A similar state of things existed in Constantinople throughout the Middle Ages. There was little creative power or poetry in literature, “their talent and their industry—and there was plenty of talent and industry—ran to the piling up of knowledge, the recording of facts, the investigation of minute points in theology or in archæology. The West had creative power without learning; the East had learning without creative power. This is the reason why the Eastern Empire lost, and may never regain, its hold upon the interests of mankind.” Bryce, *Holy Roman Empire*.

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Homer or Hesiod, Patroclus or Achilles is the older. Shall I go through the annals of all nations in order to discover who wrote the first poem? Shall I calculate the time which elapsed between Orpheus and Homer? Shall I verify the notes with which Aristarchus mangled the poetry of others, and pass my life in counting syllables?"

We find the same prevalence of pedantry in the Renaissance and in the following centuries, and the same spirit of criticism and satire. Erasmus's *In Praise of Folly* contains many passages showing the vanity, triviality and folly of pedantry. "What makes the pedants so happy," he says, "is the high opinion they have of themselves. If one of them discovers in an old moth-eaten manuscript the name of the mother of Anchises, or a word unknown to the vulgar tongue, or if he succeeds in discovering on a piece of stone certain letters hard to decipher, O, Jupiter! what

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ecstasy fills his soul! How triumphant is he! How he is hailed with applause on all sides, as if he had subdued Africa or conquered Babylon!"

In France, Montaigne uses similar language, "Cettuy-cy, tout pituiteux, chassieux et crasseux, que tu veois sortir après minuict d'une estude, penses-tu qu'il cherche parmy les livres comme il se rendra plus homme de bien, plus content, et plus sage? Nulles nouvelles; il y mourra, ou il apprendra à la postérité la mesure des vers de Plaute, et la vraye orthographie d'un mot latin."

Likewise in England, the dramatist Webster modernizes, as follows, the seventh Satire of Juvenal, in the *Duchess of Malfi*: "I knew him in Padua, a fantastical scholar, like such who study to know how many knots were in the club of Hercules, of what color Hercules's beard was, or whether Hector were not troubled with the tooth-ache." And

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Lord Bacon, in his *Advancement of Learning*, declares, "Surely, like as many substances in nature, which are solid, do putrefy and corrupt into worms; so it is the property of good and sound knowledge to putrefy and dissolve into a number of subtle, idle, unwholesome, and (as I may term them) vermiculate questions, which have indeed a kind of quickness and life of spirit, but no soundness of matter or goodness of quality."

We have seen from the foregoing brief discussion that pedantry is nothing new, but a phase of the human mind. It is closely connected with that intellectual curiosity, which is the starting point of all love for the truth; nay, it is merely the exaggeration of true scholarship. It is wrong to indulge in "*de trop faciles dédains*," and to cast contempt on all exact scholarship, merely because of its exaggeration in some cases. It is because

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scholarship is so universal to-day, that pedantry also is so widely spread.

There is an ineradicable instinct in man to synthesize the world of nature and of life. This instinct, which is seen on a larger scale in philosophy and religion, is also at work in the various sciences, in history and literature. It is just as natural, and in a certain sense as creditable, to seek to harmonize the various incompatible elements that make up Homeric scholarship as to do the same thing in chemistry or physics. It is true that in the first case the practical value is not so evident as in the second. Yet the scholar is as much interested in the history of man, in "exploring the strange voyages of man's moral reason, the impulses of the human heart, the chances and changes that have overtaken human ideas of virtue and happiness, of conduct and manners, and the shifting fortunes of the great conceptions of truth and virtue," as in

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the invention of labor-saving machines, or in obtaining cheaper food. The Humanistic ideal of to-day is essentially the same as that of the Renaissance. Only, now, scholars seek to comprehend not merely classical antiquity, but the whole world of nature and man; not only geology, astronomy and botany, but the language and literature of all nations and all times, as well as their arts and religion. The ultimate ideal of the modern Humanist is a man whose mind holds in reflection all things, becoming thus the microcosm of the great macrocosm of nature. As the world grows older, as truth becomes broader and broader, of course such an ideal is harder to realize. Yet it is possible to catch a glimpse of the whole period of knowledge. The true Humanists to-day are not the narrow specialists, but those who see, at least in general outline, the ever-widening stream of knowledge in all its breadth and depth, and do their best

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to add something to the great body of truth, whether they are scientists, literary critics, or so-called "investigators."

It is true many scholars of to-day pay too much attention to minute details, resembling also in this respect their predecessors of the Renaissance, many of whom, in the words of Hallam, "were encouragers of a numismatic and lapidary erudition, elegant in itself and throwing little specks of light on the still ocean of the past, but not very favorable to comprehensive observation, and tending to bestow on an unprofitable pedantry the honors of real learning." The Greek specialist is often more interested in archaeological detail than in the beauty of the poetry, and if, as Jebb has remarked, he should meet Helen to-day, instead of gazing with admiration at the "face that launched a thousand ships and burnt the topless towers of Ilium," he would politely ask to examine her brooch

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to see whether it were of Mycenae or Olympian workmanship.

It is especially the students of mediaeval literature who are the objects of the contempt and objurgation of the opponents of investigation. It was against them that Brunetière wrote his famous article in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*; and Lemaître declares that "ces recherches sont le refuge des honnêtes gens à qui la grande curiosité, le sentiment du beau, et le don de l'expression ont été refusés." This is largely because most of the literature of the Middle Ages is devoid of real literary value. Of course, here as elsewhere, a man must exercise common sense, and not devote his time and energy to subjects which, to quote the distinguished Italian scholar Rajna, are so utterly worthless "che appena sembrerà credibile possa trovarsi oggidì, chi all' asinina pazienza di leggere

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cotali scempiaggini aggiunga l'ardire sfacciato di volerne informare altrui." ¹

Yet here too it will not do to despise all investigation along these lines. When a man is young it will be of use for him to train himself in the methods of strict scientific research. It will serve to inspire him with a love for truth, carefulness and accuracy, and above all to avoid mere gush and sentimentality, which, unfortunately, are not always absent from purely aesthetic criticism. Again in studying the literature of the Middle Ages it is not merely the compiling of motifs, parallels, the genealogy of manuscripts, the light thrown on the history of language, that we aim at, but the insight into the human heart and mind of that time. Much of the literature is valueless from an aesthetic point of view. The art of writing was in its infancy,

¹ It will scarcely seem credible that anyone can be found to-day, who to the mule-like patience of reading such stupidities, will add the extreme boldness of wishing to inform others concerning them.

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but the imaginations of the Middle Ages are often very beautiful. The extreme beauty of the Tristan legend and the Holy Grail is seen in the fact that they have found interpreters in our own time among the greatest of our modern poets and musicians. It is in thus dealing with human needs and human longings that the student of mediaeval literature finds the true justification of all his labors. He must share the ideals of the student of the early Sacred Books of the East, of which Max Müller speaks thus: "To watch in the Sacred Books of the East the dawn of the religious conscience of man must always remain one of the most inspiring and hallowing sights in the whole history of the world; and he whose heart cannot quiver with the first quivering rays of human thought and human faith, as revealed in these ancient documents, is, in his way, as unfit for these studies as, from another side, the man who shrinks from

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copying and collating ancient manuscripts, or toiling through volumes of tedious commentary."

This noble conception of the scholar's ideal is well represented in the late Gaston Paris, who may well be taken for the ideal student of mediaeval literature, and whose high ideals were summed up in the remarks made in a lecture on the *Chanson de Roland*, at the Collège de France, December 8, 1870: "I profess absolutely and without reserve this doctrine, that science has no other object than truth, and truth for itself, without any thought of the consequences, good or bad, regrettable or happy, that this truth might have in practice. He who, by a patriotic, religious or even moral motive, allows himself the smallest dissimulation, in the facts he studies, in the conclusions he draws, is not worthy to have his place in the great laboratory where probity is a title of admission

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more indispensable than skill. Thus understood, common studies, pursued with the same spirit in all civilized countries, form outside of all nationalities, narrow, diverse, and too often hostile, a great fatherland which no war can disturb, no conqueror threaten, and in which the souls of men find the refuge and the serenity which the City of God gave them in former times." And again he says: "There is in the heart of every man, who truly loves study, a secret repugnance in giving to his labors an immediate application. The utility of science seems to him especially to reside in the elevation and detachment which it imposes on the mind of him who devotes himself to it. He has always, as it were, a secret terror, in pointing out to the public the practical results which can be drawn from his investigation, lest he may take away from them something which I will call their purity."

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Surely an investigator of this type merits our admiration. And yet even this is not the highest kind of reading. There are many scholars who are inspired with pure love for the truth, who are careful, accurate, honest intellectually, and yet are, to a certain extent, narrow. It is a beautiful trait to see men spend their days and nights in study, to see their enthusiasm and delight. Wagner in Goethe's *Faust* is the type of a dry *stubengelehrter*, and yet there is a kind of lyric quality in his joy over the discovery of an old manuscript:

Wie anders tragen uns die Geistesfreuden,
Von Buch zu Buch, von Blatt zu Blatt!
Da werden Winter-Nächte hold und schön;
Ein selig Leben wärmet alle Glieder;
Und, Ach! entrollst du gar ein würdig Pergamen,
So steigt der ganze Himmel zu dir nieder.¹

The purely professional student, investigator, scholar, may exist independent of the

¹ Far otherwise the pleasures of the mind,
Bear us from book to book, from page to page;

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larger vision of life and the world. The true reader is not the special student, but the man who in the words of Plato, prizes those studies which result in his soul getting wisdom, soberness and righteousness. And such readers are not apt so much to be scholars in the technical sense, as men of letters, to use a term which is not often employed nowadays, but which once meant something definite. Such a reader was,—as we have seen,—Montaigne, who spent his days with the great writers, yet who looked with pity on the *pituiteux savant* who ruins his health for the bauble of praise; or Milton who read not as a theologian, but as a poet and scholar; or still more Emerson, a man far from being thorough in the modern sense, declaring that we ought not to read by

Then winter nights grow cheerful; keen delight
Warms every limb; and ah! When we unroll
Some old and precious parchment, at the sight
All heaven itself descends upon the soul.

Faust, Part I. (Swanwick.)


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book-fulls, that often a chapter is enough, that the glance reveals when the gaze obscures, that we should skip the paragraphs that do not talk to us. And yet it was largely through his reading of the great writers that Emerson built up that inner life of his, which, in spite of the fact that he was not a philosopher, or a leader of men, or a great poet, or even a clear thinker and exact writer, has made him, together with Wordsworth, the greatest intellectual force and spiritual influence in the nineteenth century for the English speaking world. The true ideal of the scholar and the reader melted into one is given by Emerson in his own eloquent language: "Neither years nor books have availed to extirpate a prejudice rooted in me, that a scholar is the favorite of heaven and earth, the excellency of his country, the happiest of men."

CHAPTER III

THE POWER OF A BOOK

PERHAPS there is no better way of learning what kind of reading is best than to see what books have won the love of the masters in the art of reading. And the striking fact in every case is the emphasis they put on a few of the world's greatest books. Says Lowell, "One is sometimes asked by young men to recommend to them a course of reading. My advice would always be to confine yourself to the supreme books in whatever literature; still better to choose some one great author and grow familiar with him."



The benefit of such intensive study of the perennial books is beyond all value; by going over them again and again we become thoroughly familiar with their contents, and we enjoy the most satisfactory of all reading.

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"Happy," says Sainte-Beuve, "they who read, who reread; they who can follow their free inclinations among their books! There comes a season in life when, all work done, all active experience over, the keen joys remain of studying, of going to the depths of the things we know, the things we feel, just as we see and see again, with relish, the friends we love; pure delights of the heart and of the taste in their maturity. Then it is that the word classic takes its true meaning and defines itself for every man by his own irresistible predilection and choice."¹

Nor does the love for the great writers bring with it necessarily a neglect of the lesser men; for, as Lowell says: "You will find that in order to understand perfectly and weigh exactly any really vital piece of literature, you will be gradually and pleas-

¹ It was Sainte-Beuve who once declared that he had been doing all his life one and the same thing, reading the infinite book of the world and life.

antly persuaded to studies and explorations of which you little dreamed when you began, and will find yourself scholars before you are aware. And the moment you have an object and a centre, attention is quickened, the mother of memory; and whatever you acquire groups and arranges itself in an order which is lucid because it is everywhere in intelligent relation to an object of constant and growing interest."

It is this higher kind of reading that has aroused the personal love and passionate enthusiasm of the true readers. Whole anthologies have been made of things said in praise of books from the time of Cicero¹ down to the present; perhaps the noblest of all encomiums being that of Richard de Bury, Bishop of Durham. "The glory of the world would perish in oblivion if God had not provided mortals with the remedies of books.

¹ Delectant domi, non impediunt foris, pernoctant nobiscum, peregrinantur, rusticantur.

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Towers crumble to the earth; but he whose book lives cannot die. And it is to be considered what convenience of teaching is in books, how easily, how secretly, how safely in books we bear, without shame, the poverty of human ignorance. These are masters who instruct us without rod and cane, without words and wrath, and for no clothing or money. If you approach them, they are not asleep; if you question them, they are not secret; if you go astray, they do not grumble at you; they know not how to laugh if you are ignorant. O books! Ye only are liberal and free, who pay tribute to all who ask it, enfranchise all who serve you faithfully."

Having discussed in a general way the various motives of reading and the enthusiasm for books in general, it will be well here to go into more detail as to the extraordinary influence exerted by individual books and writers. Thoreau has said that many a man

dates a new life from the reading of a book; and there are many cases of genuine "conversion" through this means. The case of St. Augustine is well known; how in the midst of his early life of dissipation, he fell by chance on a philosophical dialogue of Cicero, the *Hortensius* (now lost); "In reading this book," he says, "I felt myself become a new man. All the vain hopes I had pursued up to that time withdrew from my mind, and I experienced an incredible passion to consecrate myself to the search after wisdom and to conquer in that way immortality. I rose, Lord, to direct my steps toward Thee".¹ Many other incidents of a similar nature could be quoted. Sometimes it is a novel, as in the case of De Amicis and the *Promessi Sposi* of Manzoni:—"I derived from the

¹ Confessions iii, 4. St. Therese was converted when, at the age of forty-one,—the turning point in her life, she read this passage: "When I came to his conversion and read how he heard the voice in the garden, it was just as if the Lord called me."

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book a keen and perpetual pleasure. It left in my mind a serenity, a peace, a self-poise, to which I had before been a stranger, a hidden harmony so to speak, to which all the voices of my being were for a time attuned. I felt that there had entered into my life the friend and master for whom I had been on the watch, and my heart told me he had come forever. I may say that the perusal of that book marks for me the passage from childhood into youth."

Sometimes it is a system of philosophy, as in the case of Kant and his effect on Schiller and Fichte: "I have found," says the former, "no living fountain, and no nourishment on this bleak plain; but the deep and profound thoughts of the Ideal philosophy remain an everlasting treasure;" while Fichte cries out, on reading the *Critique of Practical Reason*: "It raises my whole being to an indescribable elevation above all earthly considerations,

and gives me a peace I have never felt before."

It was a chance finding of Percy's *Reliques of Ancient Poetry* by Walter Scott, when he was only twelve years old, that made him a poet; reading it, as he did, under a large, platanus tree in his aunt's garden at Kelso, forgetting even the dinner hour in his new-found treasure. The same effect was produced on the French historian Thierry, who tells us how, early in life, by a sort of revelation, his true vocation was revealed to him. "It was in 1810," he says, "I was finishing my studies at the College of Blois, when a copy of Chateaubriand's *Les Martyrs*, brought from without, circulated in college. Each one read it in turn. My turn came; I feigned illness and remained in the house. I read, or rather devoured, the pages, seated before my desk, I experienced at first a vague charm, and as it were, a dazzling of the imagination. The

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impression made upon me by the war-song of the Franks was something electrical. I left the place where I was seated, and walking from one end of the room to the other, I repeated aloud, keeping time with my steps on the floor: 'Pharamond, Pharamond, we have fought with the sword'."

John Addington Symonds found in Plato a similar treasure. Having stumbled on Cary's translation of *Phaedrus* he "read on and on till I reached the end. Then I began the *Symposium*, and the sun was shining outside before I shut the book up. Here in the *Phaedrus* and *Symposium*, in the myth of a soul, I discerned the revelation I had been waiting for, the consecration of a long-cherished idealism."

Perhaps more often than anything else it is a book of religious teaching that produces these wonderful effects. No more beautiful example of the power of a

book exists than that described by George Eliot, in *The Mill on the Floss*, where Maggie Tulliver stumbles across an old copy of Thomas à Kempis's *Imitation of Christ*, in the garret. "A strange thrill of awe passed through Maggie while she read, as if she had been wakened in the night by a strain of solemn music, telling of beings whose souls had been astir, while hers was in a stupor. She knew nothing of doctrines and systems, of mysticism or quietism; but this voice of the far-off ages was the direct communication of a human soul's belief and experience, and came to Maggie as an unquestioned message. And so it remains to all time, a lasting record of human needs and human consolations; the voice of a brother who ages ago, felt and suffered and renounced, in the cloister, perhaps, with serge gown and tonsured head, with a fashion of speech different from ours, but under the same silent, far-off heavens,



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and with the same passionate desires, the same stirrings, the same failures, the same weariness.”¹

All these are but illustrations of a more general phenomenon—the deep love and devotion which many great writers have been the object of. I do not now speak of mere admiration, or intellectual appreciation of the artistic value of a writer; but of a personal love, such as men have for living friends. The great classics have been especially the objects of almost religious worship. In the midst of so much adverse discussion at the present time, it is not without interest or value to see how unanimous have been the

¹ A similar experience is that of Hazlitt when he first heard Coleridge speak. “It was in January, 1798, that I rose one morning before daylight, to walk ten miles in the mud, and went to hear this celebrated person preach. Never, the longest day I have to live, shall I have such another walk, as this cold, raw, comfortless one in the year 1798. His text was, ‘And He went up into the mountains to pray, Himself, alone.’ As he gave out the text, his voice rose like a steam of rich distilled perfume, and when he came to the last words, it seemed to me, who was then young, as if the sounds had echoed from the bottom of the human heart, and as if that prayer might have floated in solemn silence through the universe.”

great readers in their admiration and love for the classics. The reading of them is not merely "a noble pleasure," to use the Aristotelian phrase, but a power that pervades and moulds our whole existence. "It is worth the expense of youthful days and costly hours if you learn only some words in an ancient language," says Thoreau; and adds, "two thousand summers have imparted to the monuments of Greek literature, as to marble, only a maturer golden and autumnal tint; for they have carried their own serene and celestial atmosphere into all lands, to protect them against the corrosion of time." And, in equally enthusiastic language, Schopenhauer declares that "there is no more inspiring diversion for the mind than the study of the ancient classics. To take one of them in the hand, were it only for half an hour, is to feel refreshed, relieved, purified, elevated and strengthened as if we had drunk from

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a spring in a rock." Goethe is said to have dated a new life, a complete regeneration, from the time when he first seized the true spirit of the ancient master-pieces of Greek art; while with a genuine lyrical outburst of enthusiasm, Petrarch declared that he had lived with the classics so much that they had passed not merely into his memory, but into his very blood and marrow, and had become so completely mingled with his mind and soul, that even if he were to refrain from reading them as long as he lived, they would remain deeply impressed on his mind forever.¹ So, in recent times, the aged Field-Marshal Graf von Blumenthal has declared, "Es gibt nur ein Studium durch welche man nicht von der Hauptsache auf Unwesentliches abgelenkt wird, und das ist die Lektüre der alten Klassiker."²

¹. *Epistolae de Rebus Familiaribus*, xxii, 2.

². There is only one study by means of which we are not led away from the main thing to the unessential, and that is the reading of the ancient classics.

A curious phase of this love for the classics is seen in the attitude of the early Christian Fathers towards them. Brought up in the schools, they could not help reading the great Classical writers, and yet their religion taught them to regard these writers as pagans, their myths as false, and the deities that adorned their pages as demons. And so arose a struggle between their love for the classics and the dictates of their conscience. This struggle is seen especially in St. Jerome. In his youth he had studied literature with passion, had read all the profane authors, and had become so deeply imbued with them that it was impossible henceforth to forget them. "When he fled to the desert he took his library with him. In the burning solitudes of Chalcidia, between Syria and the land of the Saracens, while he lived on rye and muddy water, clothed with rags, sleeping on the bare ground, his body so emaciated that the bones

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scarcely held together, he continued to read his beloved authors, sacred and profane, and it was not the sacred books that pleased him most." "Unhappy wretch that I was," he cries out, "I fasted and I read Cicero. After having passed the nights without sleep and shed bitter tears at the memory of my faults, I took Plautus in my hand." He then relates his famous dream, in which he seemed to be transported before the Celestial Judge and cruelly scourged by the angels. When he tried to defend himself by saying that he was a Christian; "No, no," replied the angels, "you are a Ciceronian; where your treasure is there is also your heart." And he promised God to read no longer any profane book. And yet many times after this the memory of the profane authors obtruded themselves upon his mind, and he could not help quoting them. When he visited the catacombs, the impression made upon him by the

religious silence of these long galleries and the frightful alternation of light and darkness, straightway brought to his mind the verse of Vergil, which he kept repeating over and over again:

Horror ubique animo, simul ipsa silentia terrent.¹

One phase of this love for the pagan poets, was a feeling of sadness at the thought of their souls being lost forever. Legend tells how St. Paul, standing at the tomb of Vergil exclaimed:

Quem te reddidissem
Si te vivum invenissem,
Poetarum maxime.²

Once when Evodius asked St. Augustine who there could be to whom, according to St. Paul, Christ went and preached after

¹ On all sides, horror and the very silence itself terrify the soul.

² What a man I could have made of you, if I had only found you alive, Oh, greatest of poets!

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death, and whom he drew from prison, St. Augustine answered that it would be sweet for him to believe that it was the great spirits whom he learned to know when in school, and whose eloquence and genius he still admired. "There are among them orators and poets, who have given up to the laughter of the crowd the divinities of mythology, and who have proclaimed the one God. And even among those who were deceived as to the worship of God, and who rendered homage to the creature more than to the creator, there are some to be found who have lived honorably, who have given fair examples of simplicity, chastity, sobriety; who knew how to brave death for the safety of their country, kept their word not only towards their fellow citizens, but even their enemies, and who deserve to be set up as models." And he ends, saying he would indeed be glad if he were sure that they were

drawn from Hell and were enjoying eternal felicity.”¹

Long after the time of Jerome and St. Augustine this love for the classics endured in union with struggles of conscience. We are told in an Irish legend how Saint Cadoc and his disciple Gildas were walking along the sea-shore one day. Cadoc carried a volume of Vergil under his arm. All at once he burst out crying, and when Gildas demanded the reason therefor, said, “I weep, because I think that the author of this book, so sweet, finds himself perhaps in the pains of Hell.” Just then a gust of wind carried the volume

¹ Epit. 164. Bossier says: “This letter makes us think of the end of the *Gospel of Nicodemus*, where Christ reascends to Heaven taking old Adam by the hand, and with him, the patriarchs and prophets of the ancient law. To this sacred cortège which traverses space St. Augustine would like to join Plato, Cicero, Vergil and the great pagans who caught a glimpse of God.” The reader of Dante’s *Divina Commedia* will remember the beautiful scene in the Fourth Canto of the *Inferno*, where the poet sees, in Limbo, the souls of the great pagan poets, who lived virtuously, and hence are not punished in hell proper, but not having been baptized cannot dwell in paradise;

E sol di tanto offesi,
Che senza speme vivemo in disio.

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from under his arm out to sea, and Cadoc made a vow, no more to eat or drink, till it was revealed to him what fate God reserves for those pagans, who while on earth sang as the angels in heaven. Soon after, he fell asleep and seemed to hear a voice saying, "Pray for me, pray for me. Be not weary; for I shall sing forever, in heaven above, the mercies of the Lord." The day afterward a fisherman brought him a fish, which, on being opened, was found to contain the copy of Vergil he had lost.

CHAPTER IV

THE GREAT PROSE WRITERS

The personal love for books which we have discussed above, is chiefly bestowed upon the poets; and yet there have been certain writers of prose who have won the love and admiration of countless readers. It is not the place here to discuss all such writers. Everyone knows the extraordinary influence of Aristotle, though it was not pure book-love that led to it; the sentiment aroused by the founder of Scholasticism, the *Maestro di color che sanno*, as Dante calls him, was admiration rather than love. With Plato the case is different. Few writers have ever lived who have aroused such deep personal love as he. His influence on the early Christian Church is universal. St. Augustine found in

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him the teacher that led him to Christ,¹ while Boethius, that

Anima santa, che il mondo fallace
Fa manifesta a chi di lei ben ode²,—

who became the schoolmaster of the Middle Ages by his translations from Plato and Aristotle, influenced the after centuries by his famous *De Consolatione Philosophiae*, where he tells how while in prison he is visited by a beautiful lady, who turns out to be Philosophy and with whom he has a long discussion on the true object of a man's life. The *Consolation of Philosophy* is a genuine Socratic dialogue on the highest good in Plato's sense. We see in it the same contempt for earthly pleasures, for wealth and power, and beauty, all of which things are ephemeral and must surely pass away. We

¹ It was the *Hortensius* of Cicero, of which we have already spoken, that first revealed to St. Augustine the philosophy of Plato.

² Saintly soul, that shows the world's deceitfulness to all who hear of him. Dante, *Paradiso*, x, 125.

must not seek happiness in this mundane sphere, but rather where beyond the starry firmament, it dwells in the heaven of unfading light, where the soul of the world is enthroned in the centre of things: for there and there only is the home of the supreme good, towards which all things tend:

Hic est cunctis communis amor,
 Repetuntque boni fine teneri;
 Quia non aliter durare queant,
 Nisi converso rursus amore
 Refluant causae, quae dedit esse.¹

During the Middle Ages Plato's star de-

¹The love of the Godhead is common to all,
 And the good seek to return to the Father;
 For not otherwise can they have eternal life,
 Except the stream of their love, backward turned,
 Leads them to the source whence they came.

The *Consolation of Philosophy* was one of the most famous books of the Middle Ages; it was translated by King Alfred and Chaucer; quoted by the author of the *Roman de la Rose*, and by countless others; it comforted Dante at the death of Beatrice, and Sir Thomas More while in prison. Holbein's portrait of the latter's daughter, shows her holding a copy of the *Consolation* in her hand. In the letters of Ser Lapo Mazzei, a Florentine notary of the end of the eleventh century, he speaks of Boethius's work as the highest philosophy, "though to-day simple people hold it cheap, because it is a common book for the youngest pupil in our schools."

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clined amid the clouds of dense ignorance, but rose again with peculiar lustre in the days of the Renaissance. His name was revered in the highest degree, his works were passionately studied, and men almost worshiped him. The German mystic Eckhart had called him "des grosse Pffaffe;" but it was Marsilio Ficino, leader of the Platonic Academy at Florence, who lavished upon him the most affection. To him he was almost a saint, and he kept a lamp burning constantly before his image. In his house he had inscribed mottoes illustrating Plato's contempt for worldly honors and wealth; "esteem not money;" "seek not after honors;" "fly from all business."

The whole Renaissance is steeped with the spirit of Plato, chiefly taking on the form of ecstatic adoration of beauty. The doctrine of the *Symposium* became the gospel of all men, poets, philosophers, artists. One has

only to read the *Corteggiano* of Castiglione, the poetry of Michael Angelo and Lorenzo the Magnificent in Italy, of Du Bellay and the Pléiade in France, and of Spenser in England, to see how widely the Platonic doctrine of beauty as steps along which to ascend to God, had been spread:

"The means, therefore, which unto us is lent
Him to behold, is on his works to looke,
Which he hath made in beauty excellent;
And in the same, as in a brasen booke,
To read enregistered in every worke
His goodness, which his beautie doth declare;
For all that's good is beautiful and faire."¹

We have no time to speak of the Cambridge Platonists in the seventeenth century,

¹ Spenser,—*Hymn to Heavenly Beauty*. Roger Ascham tells us how once, when he called on Lady Jane Grey, her parents, with all the household, were hunting in the park: "I found her in her chamber, reading *Phaedo Platonis* in Greek, and that with as much delight as some gentlemen would read a merry tale of Boccaccio. After salutation and duty done, with some other talk, I asked her why she would lose such pastime in the park? Smiling she answered me: 'I wist all their sport in the park is but a shadow to that pleasure that I find in Plato.'"

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John Smith, Glanvil, Henry Moore, and the poet Henry Vaughan. Leaving likewise aside all reference to the influence of Plato on modern philosophy, we pass on to touch lightly on the love of modern writers for Plato. We cannot fail to recognize the deep passionate love he has inspired in men like Shelley, and especially Emerson. Probably no man since the death of Plato was so filled with the spirit of the master as Emerson. He was a student all his life of the great Idealist, and his works, both in prose and poetry, are soaked through and through with the thoughts, almost the very words of Plato; "The writings of Plato," he cries out, "have preoccupied every school of learning, every lover of thought, every church, every poet, making it impossible to think on certain levels except through him. He stands between the truth and every man's mind, and has almost impressed language and the

primary forms of thought with his name and seal."

One of the most touching examples of how an author, twenty-five hundred years old, has still the power to help and comfort, is seen in the case of Marion Crawford, a short time ago, who, on his death-bed, requested his daughter to read him extracts from Plato's *Dialogues*, saying that they taught him serenity in death, and whose last words were, "I enter serenely into eternity."

Cicero, another of the great prose writers of antiquity, has been the object of a similar love and admiration, chiefly, however, on account of the perfection of his form. As we have seen, Saint Augustine was practically converted from his idle ways by reading the now lost *Hortensius*, in which for the first time he caught a glimpse of the Platonic idealism. In his Letter to Cicero, Petrarch calls him "Father supreme of Roman

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Eloquence;" and says, "I yield you hearty thanks, not for myself alone, but for all of us, who adorn ourselves with the flowers of the Latin language. Yours are the springs from which we water our meadows; you are the leader who marshals us, you the light that shines on our path." Poggio Bracciolini, Petrarch's disciple, declares, "whatever there is in me, I owe it all to Cicero, whom I have chosen as my instructor in eloquence;" and Erasmus, in his beautiful Preface to the *Tusculan Disputations*, written only two years before his death, says, "Whether I have made progress with advancing years, I know not; but certainly I have never loved Cicero more than I do now."

Among the early Christian Fathers, one man has exerted a marvellous influence by his books, and that is St. Augustine, whose *Confessions* wrought the conversion of St. Therese, and have been the favorite reading

of men so various as Petrarch and Luther; and the essence of whose character, as seen in this book, is summed up by Professor Harmack as follows: "He knew his own heart to be his worst possession, and the living God to be his highest good; he lived in the love of God, and he possessed a fascinating power of expressing his observations on the inner life. In doing this, he taught the world that the highest and sweetest enjoyment was to be sought in the feeling that springs from a soul that has triumphed over its pain, from the love of God as the foundation of good, and therefore from the certainty of Grace. . . . He was a tree planted by the waters, whose leaves do not fade and on whose branches the birds of the air dwell. His voice pealed forth to the Church through the centuries, and he preached to Christendom the words: 'Blessed is the man whose

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strength Thou art, in whose heart are Thy ways.' ”¹

It would take far more space than is at our disposal here to discuss, even in the briefest manner, all the great works of prose which have won the love of mankind, the works of such men as Marcus Aurelius and Epictetus, whose words of high spiritual uplift have become the treasures of the world, and even to-day exercise a calming and healing power in the midst of the nerve-racking life of modern civilization;² Boethius, of whose *Conso-*

¹In another book Harnack declares that “the significance of the *Confessions* is as great on the side of form as on that of content. Before all they were a literary *achievement*. No poet, no philosopher before him undertook what he here performed; and I may add that almost a thousand years had to pass before a similar thing was done. It was the poets of the Renaissance, who formed themselves on Augustine, that first gained the daring to depict themselves, and to present their personality to the world. For the *Confessions* of Augustine contain the most exact portraiture of a distinct human personality, in his development from childhood to full age, with all his propensities, feelings, aims, mistakes; a portrait of a soul, in act, drawn with a perfection of observation that leaves on one side the mechanical devices of psychology, and pursues the method of the physician and the physiologist.”

²Walton, in his book *Don't Worry*, devotes two of his

lation of Philosophy we have already spoken; Plutarch, whose *Lives*, though ignored by his contemporaries, have been the inspiration of countless thousands, from Rienzi and Petrarch, to St. Evremond, Montesquieu and Rousseau; of whom Theodore Gaza declared that if all books were destroyed he would save only Plutarch; and who in Amyot's translation was the favorite reading of Montaigne: "Nous aultres ignorants," he says, "estions perdus, si ce livre ne nous eust relevés du borbier; sa merci nous osons à cette heure et parler et escrire; les dames en régentent les maistres d'eschole; c'est notre bréviaire."¹

Another famous book is Thomas à Kempis's *Imitation of Jesus Christ*, whose effect on George Eliot we have already seen; which chapters on the benefit to the health of reading the works of these two authors.

¹It was from North's translation of Amyot's French translation of Plutarch that Shakspeare got the material for his Roman plays, *Julius Cæsar*, *Anthony and Cleopatra*, etc.

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the French philosopher Comte made a part of the daily ritual of his Positivist Religion; from which Matthew Arnold filled his notebooks with frequent quotations; and which was found in the pocket of General Gordon at his death at Khartoum.¹

In more recent years no book has had more genuine admiration than the *Essays* of Montaigne. They have been the *vade mecum* of the world's best thinkers ever since they were first made public. Emerson, to mention only one out of a thousand of his admirers, tells how his love began and grew for this admirable gossip. A single odd volume of Cotton's translation had remained from his father's

¹"An ideal raised to such an elevation cannot be dangerous. For it is apprehended that the study of the *Imitation* may spread through the whole nation the contagion of asceticism? No, but if this ideal, placed thus before our eyes, makes us attach a somewhat less value to riches, honors, vain laudation; if it helps us to put off, though ever so little, an immoderate love of what is only brilliant and evanescent, to worship ourselves a little less, what is there to complain of? Do we fancy that there will ever be found among us too many men of pacific, humble, disinterested character?"—Caro.

library, when he was a boy. "It lay long neglected, until, after many years, when I was newly escaped from college, I read the book and procured the remaining volumes. I remember the delight and wonder in which I lived with it. It seemed to me as if I had written the book in some former life, so sincerely it spoke my thoughts and experience." And Emerson goes on to say how, in 1833, he went to Paris, visited the cemetery of Père-Lachaise, and saw there the tomb of Auguste Collignon, who died in 1830, aged sixty-eight years, and who, according to the inscription, "lived to do right, and had formed himself to virtue, on the *Essays* of Montaigne."

What more shall we say of the great prose writers? For time fails us to speak of Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, that book which "follows the Bible from land to land, as the singing of the birds follows the dawn," and

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which Dean Stanley declares, after the English Bible, has with few exceptions, contributed more than all other books to the common culture of the Anglo-Saxon race; Cervantes, who satirizes not only his own times and the books of chivalry, but all times and man himself, showing us on one side Don Quixote, the impractical dreamer and idealist, and on the other Sancho Panza, the materialist, who cares for nothing but the joys and pleasures of the body; or Rousseau, whose influence on men like Goethe and Kant is well known, and of whom Tolstoi declared not long ago, "Rousseau has been my master. I have recently reread him and found the same elevation and admiration, as when a boy. To him all can be grateful for having loved God, love, childhood, and the free and simple life in the midst of nature." Nay even the novels of Dickens, full as they are of faults of style and taste, yet have won the gratitude and

love of untold thousands, for their kindly humor, and especially their deep sympathy with the poor and downtrodden; and we all can sympathize with the lady who met the novelist in the streets of York one day, and said: "Mr. Dickens, will you let me touch the hand that has filled my house with many friends?"¹

We cannot close this part of our discussion without saying a word about the *Essays* of Emerson. Though so recently living among us, he has become one of the world's classics. His influence on the youth of the whole western world cannot be overestimated. Matthew Arnold has declared him to be, together with Wordsworth, the greatest influence of the nineteenth century; and

¹The extraordinary hold of Dickens on the hearts of the people was shown in an item in a New York paper some time ago, telling how a drunken man entered a saloon and began to shoot at the pictures hanging on the wall, but stopping before a portrait of Dickens, cried out, "That's Dickens. I'll shoot any man who touches that."

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Herman Grimm tells us how at first he could not understand him, but later became fascinated by the strange charm of his writings. "The power that the richest genius has in Shakspere, Raphael, Goethe, Beethoven, to reconcile the soul to life, to give joy for heaviness, to dissipate fears, to transfigure care and toil, to convert lead into gold, and to lift the veil that conceals the forms of hope," Grimm ascribes in the highest measure to Emerson. "As I read, all seems old and familiar, as if it was my own well-worn thought; all seems new, as if it never occurred to me before. When I take up his volume, I feel the pure air. He regards the world in its immediate aspect with fresh visions; the thing done or occurring before him opens the way to serene heights. For me was the breath of life, for me was the rapture of spring, for me love and desire, for me the secret of wisdom and power. Emer-

son fills me with courage and confidence. He presents familiar facts, but he places them in new lights and combinations. From every object the lines run straight out, connecting it with the central point of life. What I had hardly dared to think, it was so bold, he brings forth as quietly as if it were the most familiar commonplace. He dreads no tempest, for he is sure the calm will follow it; he does not hate, contradict or dispute, for he understands men and loves them. As I think of this man, I have understood the devotion of pupils who would share any fate with their master, because his genius banished doubt and imparted life to all things."

CHAPTER V

THE LOVE OF THE GREAT POETS

THE books which we have discussed in the preceding chapter as the object of passionate love and admiration of so many distinguished men, are all in prose. This high, almost mystical love for books, however, is in general chiefly aroused by the poets. In the case of prose writers, it is almost invariably the subject matter that attracts our love; in the case of poetry the music of verse, the cadence of rhythm, the less common forms of speech, are inextricably mingled with the thought. "For poetry shares with music," as Gumperz says, "the power possessed in a lower degree by the other arts, and even by the beautiful in nature, of creating that inward peace, which reigns when the whole per-

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sonality dominates over its minor elements, and of producing the intense pleasure peculiar to this state of physical equilibrium."

A whole book could be made of what has been said about poets and poetry. Plato declares they know not what they produce, but that God takes possession of their minds, and speaks through them. "The poet's eye," says Shakspeare,

In a fine frenzy rolling,
Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to
heaven;
And, as imagination bodies forth
The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen
Turns them to shapes, and gives to airy nothing
A local habitation and a name.

One branch of poetry itself has been devoted to the praise of poets,—this in modern times chiefly taking the form of sonnets. Thus we have the sonnets of Carducci on Homer, Vergil and Dante, Wordsworth's sonnet on Milton, and Keats's on Homer;

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while the work of more recent poets, such as William Watson, Richard Watson Gilder, Henry Van Dyke, is especially fertile in this kind of "poetry on the poets."

Of all men who have written about poets and poetry, however, none has spoken with deeper insight and love, and with words more tremulous themselves with poetry,—though in prose—than Emerson: "So when the soul of the poet has come to ripeness of thought, she detaches and sends away from it poems or songs,—a fearless, sleepless, deathless progeny, which is not exposed to the accidents of the weary kingdom of time; a fearless, vivacious offspring, clad with wings which carry them fast and far, and infix them irrecoverably into the hearts of men." And again he cries out, "All that we call sacred history attests the birth of a poet as the principal event in chronology. Man never so often deceived, still watches for the

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arrival of a brother who can hold him steady to a truth, until he has made it his own. With what joy I begin to read a poem, which I confide in as an inspiration! And now my chains are to be broken; I shall mount above these clouds and opaque airs in which we live, opaque, though they seem transparent, and from the heaven of truth I shall see and comprehend my relations. That will reconcile me to life and renovate nature, to see trifles animated by a tendency, and to know what I am doing. Life will no more be a noise; now I shall see men and women, and know the signs by which they may be discerned from fools and satans. This day shall be better than my birthday, now I am invited into the science of the real."

As we look over the field of literature, and notice this passion for the poets, we are struck by the fact that here, as well as in the actual relations of life, men differ in their

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likes and dislikes. Not all men love the same poet, even though he be Homer. Ovid tells us how his father despised the great poet, because he died poor,

Mæonides ispe nullas reliquit opes;
and the great scholar Scaliger who preferred Seneca to Euripides, likewise preferred Vergil to Homer.¹

Of course here, as elsewhere, race, temperament, special studies and environment, affect our likes and dislikes. It is hard for English-speaking people to appreciate Racine and Corneille, or even Molière to his full extent. So the French find it difficult to appreciate Shakspeare and Goethe. Often national pride comes in to affect us. All Germans

¹ The Elizabethan translator of Homer, George Chapman has his word to say concerning Scaliger's preference of Vergil to Homer: "And thou soule-blind Scaliger, never didst thou more palpably damn thy drowsy spirit in all thy all-countries-exploded filcheries than in thy senceless reprehension of Homer, whose spirit flew as much above thy grovelling capacitie as heaven moves above *Barathrum*."

are bound to consider Goethe the equal of Shakspeare or Homer, while the French feel equally bound to admire their own great poets. When M. Scherer ventured to criticise Molière, a few years ago, and show that he had certain faults and negligences of style, he was deluged with injurious, personal epithets, one man calling him with gentle courtesy, "une bête allemande d'outre Rhin."

We have some striking examples of this personal bias, in the case of Voltaire, who praised the courage of Bettinelli for daring to say that Dante was "un fou et son ouvrage un monstre,"—and himself writes, "The Italians call him *divine*, but 'tis a hidden divinity; few people understand his oracles; his reputation will continue to grow stronger, for hardly any one reads him;" and who, in his *Candide*, makes Pococurante speak of Milton and his *Paradise Lost* as follows: "What! that barbarian who makes a long commen-

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tary on the first chapter of Genesis in ten books of hard verses? That coarse imitator of the Greeks who disfigures creation? What shall I esteem the man who has spoilt the hell and devil of Tasso, disguises Lucifer now in the form of a toad, now of a pygmy;—who, imitating seriously the comic invention of Ariosto, makes the devils shoot cannons in heaven? The marriage of Sin and Death, and the adders that Sin brings forth, make a man vomit, who has the least delicate taste, Ce poëme obscur, bizarre et dégoutant fut méprisé à sa naissance; je le traite aujourd'hui comme il fut traité dans sa patrie par les contemporains.”¹

Among the curious cases of men who loved one book more than others, may be men-

¹ M. Scherer—from whose essay on Milton I quote the above—himself declares the *Paradise Lost*, to be “un poëme faux, un poëme grotesque, un poëme ennuyeux, il n'est pas un lecteur sur cent qui puisse lire sans sourire les livres neuvième et dixième, ou lire sans bailler les livres onzième et douzième.” Yet at the same time he does justice to Milton's true greatness.

tioned Leibnitz, who always had Vergil in his hand when at leisure, and read him so often, that in old age he could repeat whole books by heart. Grotius had such a taste for Lucan that he always carried a pocket edition with him, and was seen to kiss his hand-book with the rapture of a true votary.¹

Sir William Jones read Cicero through once a year, a task, or duty, which Voltaire performed for the *Athalie* of Racine, and the *Petit Carême* of Massillon. Malherbe was particularly fond of Horace, laid him on his pillow, took him with him when he walked in the fields, and called him his breviary. Gibbon never went alone without a copy of the *Odyssey* in his pocket; while Goethe had a dislike for Horace, and preferred Ovid, whom he read constantly, and imitated in his

¹ A similar act of devotion is related by Leigh Hunt of Lamb,—“I thought how natural it was for Charles Lamb to give a kiss to an old folio, as I once saw him do to Chapman’s *Homer*.”

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Römische Elegien. Of Alexander Pope, who was once ranked among the master geniuses of English literature, Byron writes in language of most extravagant praise: "Neither time, nor distance, nor age can ever diminish my veneration for him, who is the great moral poet of all times, of all classes, of all feelings, and of all stages of existence. The delight of my boyhood, the study of my manhood, perhaps (if allowed to me to attain it) he may be the consolation of my age. His poetry is the book of life. . . . A thousand years will roll away before such another poet can be hoped for in our literature."

Even in the case of the great poets, there is a vast amount of variation. An eminent American critic declared recently that he cannot read Dante with pleasure. Emerson read all the fifty-five volumes of Goethe, yet cannot love him; and, as we have already seen, or shall see later, the same variation in

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love and admiration have reigned even in the case of the world's supreme poets, Homer, Vergil, Milton and Shakspeare.

Of course in tracing the influence and love of great books, we must carefully eliminate from discussion all expression of love and admiration which are purely literary cant. Many educated people would not dare to express their real feeling concerning the great poets, whom they have felt it was necessary to read, and yet who give them but little real pleasure. An example of this sort is told by the late James T. Fields of a certain *Bourgeois Gentilhomme* of Boston, who, desirous of making himself literary, was advised by a friend to read Shakspeare, and who after a few months, confided to his adviser "that he did not believe ten men in all Boston could have written them plays." "Aimez donc," says Boileau—of Homer,

Aimez donc ses écrits, mais d'un amour sincère.

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Yet when all this conventional enthusiasm and literary cant is put aside, we see a long list of men and women, who have loved with a deep, abiding passion, the great poets of the world's literature, and it is in reading of their love and enthusiasm that our own is excited.

This intense personal love has never found profounder expression than in the worship of Lucretius for his masters Empedocles and Epicurus. Of the former, who was born in Agrigentum, Sicily, he says, alluding to his native land,

Rebus opima bonis, multa munita vivorum vi,
Nil tamen hoc habuisse viro praeclarius in se
Nec sanctum magis, et mirum carumque videtur.
Carmina quinetiam divini pectoris ejus
Vociferantur et exponunt praeclara reperta,
Ut vix humana videtur stirpe creatus¹.

¹Rich in all good things, guarded by a large force of men, yet seems it to have held within it nothing more glorious than this man, nothing more holy, marvellous and dear. The verses too of his godlike genius cry with

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But it is Epicurus that drew out the whole treasures of his gratitude and affection. Few poets have uttered their love for their master with more genuine and profound conviction than Lucretius in the *De Rerum Natura*. Almost every book is begun with a passionate eulogy of his Greek predecessor in the doctrine of the atomic theory. In Book V he declares that Epicurus is greater than Ceres or Bacchus, who invented grain and wine, for men can live without them :

At bene non poterat sine puro pectore vivi;¹
and greater than Hercules, who purged the forests of wild beasts; for it is a better thing to cleanse the heart of evil passions :

At nisi purgatumst pectus, quae proelia nobis,
Atque pericula tunc ingratis insinuandum!
Haec igitur qui cuncta subegerit ex animoque

a loud voice, and set forth in such wise his glorious discoveries, that he hardly seems born of a mortal stock.
—Munro.

¹“But a happy life was not possible without a clean breast.”

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Expulerit dictis, non armis, nonne decebit
Hunc hominem numero divom dignarier esse?¹

It was the genius of Epicurus that broke
the barriers of the world,

Ergo vivida vis animi pervicit, et extra,
Processit longe flammantia moenia mundi,²

and which brought back and expounded in
his eternal verses the truth that was to make
man free, so that,

Floriferis ut apes in saltibus omnia libant,
Omnia nos itidem depascimur aurea dicta,
Aurea, perpetua semper dignissima vita.³

To discuss at length the love of men for all
the various poets, ancient and modern, would
require a large book. We have space here

¹ "But unless the breast is cleared, what battles and dangers must then find their way into us in our own despite! He therefore who shall have subdued all these and banished them from the mind by words, not by arms, shall he not have a just title to be ranked among the gods?"

² Therefore the living force of his soul gained the day; on he passed far beyond the flaming walls of the world.

³ Like as bees sip of all things in the flowery lawns, we in like manner feed from thy pages upon all the golden maxims, golden, I say, most worthy ever of endless life.

only for the greatest of the world's poets, and even of these, many must be dismissed with a brief mention. Such is Sophocles, who "looked with steady, serene and solemn gaze upon the actual world, and saw there good and evil balanced and commingled; but over all he saw the light of an ideal, supreme, unchanging, ultimate; a law of piety, faithfulness and purity, whose embodiment in human life is independent of change and chance, of caprice and fortune. He used tragedy to help men realize what is most worth living for, and draws their minds away from the narrow cares and petty troubles to the practical contemplation of universal good and evil." Such is Ovid, whose influence was so great on the mediaeval doctrines of love,—and whose *Metamorphoses* have made Pyramus and Thisbe, and Hero and Leander proverbial as examples of faithful and tragic love. Such also is Catullus, "tenderest of Roman poets,"

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whose tragic fate and tender love for his brother have endeared him to the hearts of multitudes. Even Horace we must pass over rapidly, without discussing the strange vicissitudes that have overtaken his glory in recent times, especially in Germany and England, where later scholars are inclined to deny him genuine genius, and to regard his poetry merely as translations from Alexandrian originals, and brilliant *tours de force* in the way of metric exercises. Yet we must remember that countless thousands have loved Horace, have learned him by heart, and have felt him to be a power in their lives. We must not forget, that if Goethe is cold to him, and Niebuhr and Tyrrell assign to him a subordinate place in the galaxy of world-poets, yet Scaliger said of such poems as *Donec gratus eram tibi*, and that on *Melpomene*, that they are sweeter than nectar or ambrosia, and

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that he would rather be the author of such odes, than king of all Aragon; further that the last book that the late Pope took from his library and fondly opened was a volume of Horace; and that Cornelius de Witt, accused of an attempt to assassinate William of Orange, kept his equanimity, in the midst of torture, by quoting the lines :

Justum et tenacem propositi virum
Non civium ardor prava jubentium,
Non voltus instantis tyranni
Mente quatit solida, neque Auster,
Dux inquieti turbidus Hadriaë,
Nec fulminantis magna manus Jovis;
Si fractus inlabatur orbis,
Impavidum ferient ruinae¹.

Of all the world-poets none has enjoyed

¹ The righteous man of purpose fixed and strong
Scorns the depraved commands
Of angry faction clamoring for wrong,
Nor fears the Despot's frown. Not Auster's roar,
Not the red thunder hurled
From Jove's avenging hands
Can shake his iron will. Erect he stands
Erect amid the ruins of the world.

—De Vere.

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such universal homage as Homer. It is true that he has had his vicissitudes,—in ancient times, in Alexandria, and at the end of the seventeenth century, in France, in the celebrated *Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes*. But these are of little importance compared to the almost universal worship of the ages. Nor is this unanimity of love and admiration due simply to his antiquity, for as Lanson says, “Men do not love Homer because he is three thousand years old, but he is three thousand years old because men have loved and admired him. It is not the antiquity of the poems, it is the perpetuity of the approbation that has been given them, that guarantees their perfection. ‘For’ says Longinus, translated by Boileau, ‘when in a great number of persons, different by profession and age, and who have no relation either of disposition or inclination, everybody is struck with some part of a discourse, this uniform

judgment and this approbation of so many minds is a certain proof that there is something marvellous and great. When to the diversity of age and temperament, humor and profession, is added that of races, epochs and manners, the uniformity of approbation will be a still more certain and indubitable mark of excellence of the work. Consequently, if we do not feel ourselves this beauty, we must not condemn them for that, but doubt ourselves and our lights. For, finally, the duration and universality of the reputation of a writer are effects which have a sufficient cause: it is this cause which we must find, and seek, if necessary, with patience and humility until we find it, and not believe easily that we have more intelligence than all the world. Now this cause is the effective and intrinsic beauty of the work'."

Out of the multitude of testimonials of homage to Homer we have only room for a

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few. In his *Republic* Plato makes constant appeals to the great poet as a witness in ethics and psychology; and attributes to Socrates the words,—“I have loved Homer ever since I was a boy, and he appears to me to be the great author and master of poetry;” while Xenophon makes one of his characters say, “My father desirous that I should become a good man made me learn the poems of Homer by heart, so that now I could repeat the whole of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* by heart.” Plutarch said that Alexander called Homer a portable treasure of military knowledge, and had a copy corrected by Aristotle, which he kept in a rich casket found among the spoils of Darius. “Darius,” Alexander declared, “used to keep his ointments in this casket. I who have no time to anoint myself, will convert it to a nobler use.”

Plato's own attitude to Homer is a singular one. In the *Republic* he shows himself hos-

tile to him, regards his poems as harmful to youth, and would fain banish him and all poets from his ideal State. Yet he quotes him constantly in all his Dialogues as an authority on all subjects, and shows that he knew the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* by heart. Indeed, his attitude is not at all unlike that of the Christian Fathers to the classic authors, which we have discussed above.¹

Everybody knows how Horace constantly quotes and refers to Homer as the unrivalled master of song; how he sees in him an interpreter of all human phenomena; and how, in *Epistles*, 1, 2, he tells how he finds in Homer, whom he has just read over again, the teachings of wisdom and virtue better and more attractively represented than in all the textbooks of the most famous philosophers.

¹ "Although I have always from my earliest youth had an awe and love for Homer, which even now makes the words falter on my lips, for he is the great captain and teacher of all that goodly band of tragic writers; but a man is not to be revered before the truth, and therefore I will speak out."—*Republic*, Book x.

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Passing over the praises of Quintilian, of Dante and Petrarch (neither of these two knew Homer in the original), and of Lord Bacon,¹ we hasten to modern times when Homer has come to his own again, especially in England and Germany. Schiller says of the Twenty-third book of the *Iliad* that the man who had read this had not lived in vain. "Its paternity," he says, "may be disputable, but that nature herself was its mother is stamped forever on its features." Gladstone, near the

¹ "For have not the verses of Homer continued twenty-five hundred years or more, without the loss of a syllable or letter? During which time infinite palaces, temples, castles, cities, have been destroyed and demolished."—*Advancement of Learning*. George Chapman compares Homer to Vergil as follows:—"I would not be thought so ill created as to be a malicious detractor of so admired a poet as Virgill, but a true justifier of Homer, who must not be read for a few lines, with leaves turned over capriciously, in dismembered fractions, but throughout the whole drift, weight and height of his works, set before the apprehensive eyes of his judge; the majesty he enthrones and the spirit he infuseth into the scope of his work, so far outshining Virgill that his skirmishes are but mere scramblings of boys to Homer's; the silken body of Virgill's muse, curiously drest in gilt and embroidered silver; but Homer's in plain, massy and unvalued gold; not only all learning, government and wisdom being deduced, as from a bottomless fountain, from him, but all wit, elegance, disposition and judgment."

end of his life, read the *Iliad* for the thirtieth time, finding it at every reading "richer and more glorious than before;" and Humboldt declared that on his dying bed a passage or even a line from Homer would give him comfort. So Goethe declared that a verse of Homer's, even the most insignificant, is a strain of music out of a land which we regard as a better one, and yet not far from us. While reading Homer, he declares, "I feel as if I were in an airship, raised far above all earthly things, poised in the intermediate space between heaven and earth, where gods flit to and fro." And again he cries out, "What means all this pain and pleasure? Let us take refuge in the world of Homer's poetry. Even to-day, his songs have the power, at least for a few moments, to free us from the fearful burden of the knowledge, experience and speculation, which thousands of years have laid on our shoulders, and to let

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us sip the dew of the early morning of creation." Never in the whole history of literature was a nobler or more beautiful testimony given of the love of one great poet for another than in Keats's incomparable *Sonnet on first looking into Chapman's Homer*, which, though so well known, must here be given in its entirety:

Much have I travelled in the realms of gold,
And many goodly states and kingdoms seen;
Round many western islands have I been
Which bards in fealty to Apollo hold.
Oft of one wide expanse had I been told
That deep-browed Homer ruled as his demesne;
Yet never did I breathe its pure serene
Till I heard Chapman speak out loud and bold;
Then felt I like some watcher of the skies
When a new planet swims into his ken;
Or like stout Cortez when with eagle eyes
He stared at the Pacific—and all his men
Looked at each other with a wild surmise;—
Silent, upon a peak in Darien.

Although not so universally admired as

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Homer, especially to-day when literary critics are apt to deny him the highest genius, the influence of Vergil, taking it all in all, has been wider, more unbroken, and fraught with more personal affection than that of any other poet. The knowledge of Homer and Plato was practically *nil* during the Middle Ages, and the admiration expressed for them was mostly second-hand and perfunctory. Not so with Vergil. From the days when "he entered the theatre an awkward, slovenly youth and the whole house rose to do him honor," down to the present, there have been countless men who have loved and honored him. There must be some reason for this, and this reason undoubtedly is not only the perfect form in which his not too original thoughts were clothed, but the sweet and gentle character of the man, the noble uprightness of his soul, and that deep touch of tenderness and pity with which he regarded the great multi-

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tude of suffering humanity. Innumerable testimonials could be given to prove the hold which Vergil has had on the heart of mankind. Horace declares that nature never produced a whiter soul; for centuries the *Aeneid* was the first book to be put into the hands of Roman youth; and it was from this that men like Seneca, Tacitus and Juvenal learned their style. The selection of Vergil for such a purpose, as well as the selection of Homer for learning Greek is praised by Quintilian, not only for the beauty of their poetry, but also for the pure and noble sentiments inspired by the works of the two poets; "Although," he adds, "to understand their beautiful qualities a more mature judgment is necessary; but there will be time enough for this; for they will not be read once only." ¹

The same enthusiasm shown by Quintilian

¹ Quamquam ad intelligendas eorum virtutes firmiore iudicio opus est; sed huic rei superest tempus, neque enim semel legentur, I, 8, 5.

for Homer is shown by Macrobius for Vergil; he was not only learned in all kinds of knowledge, but was practically infallible, "*quem nullius umquam disciplinae error involvit.*"

So popular, even in the sixth century, was Vergil, that public lectures on the *Aeneid* were given in the Roman Forum. Even the Christian Fathers could not help loving the gentle pagan poet, and we find their pages full of references to, and quotations from, Vergil. Thus Jerome, in his solitude in the Eastern desert, hearing how Rome had been taken by Alaric, expressed the profound grief he felt at this tremendous event, by quoting from the *Aeneid*.¹ In similar manner, Augustine, Lactantius, Minucius Felix, and other ecclesiastical writers, quote lines from Vergil in which they recognize a certain resemblance with Christian principles. We have already

¹ *Luctus, ubique pavor et plurima mortis imago.*

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seen how St. Paul, visiting the tomb of the poet at Naples, wept warm tears and exclaimed "what a man would I have made of you if I had found you alive, O supreme poet."

From all these circumstances it was an easy thing for legend to take possession of Vergil and to make of him a Christian. One of the most curious phases of literary reputation is the way in which the pagan poet of Rome was metamorphosed into a prophet of the coming of Christ,¹ a magician, an astrologer, a great "clerk," a sort of mediaeval Dr. Faust. It would be an interesting task here to cite many of these

¹ In early Christian art and literature the name of Vergil was often joined to that of the Sibyl, and in more than one Mystery Play—among other characters was that of Vergil. In that given at Rheims, after Moses, David, Elizabeth, John the Baptist, and others, the Procentor calls Vergil saying:

Vates Maro gentilium

Da Christo testimonium,—

and Vergil advanced on the stage dressed as a young man, and says:

Ecce polo, demissa solo, nova progenies est.

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legendary references to Vergil in the Middle Ages. We have room here, however, for one only; an example taken from Eustache Deschamps, which shows to what degree Vergil has descended in the popular imagination, and which illustrates also the satirical spirit against the wiles of woman in the Middle Ages;

Par femme fu mis à destruction
Sanxes li fort et Hercules en rage,
Ly roy Davys à redargucion,
Si fut Merlins soubz le tombel en caige.
Nul ne se puet garder de leur langaige.
Par femme fut en la corbeille à Romme,
Virgile mis, dont ot moult hontaige;
Il n'est chose que femme ne consume¹.

Of the innumerable legends attached to the name of Vergil in the Middle Ages, it will

¹By woman Samson the strong man was put to destruction, Hercules went mad, King David brought to reproach, Merlin confined in a cage beneath the tomb. No one can defend himself from their wiles. By a woman Virgil was placed in a basket in Rome, of which he had great shame. There is nothing that woman cannot accomplish.

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be sufficient here to refer to two only, the one which tells of the inextinguishable lamp burning before a statue of an archer, with arrow drawn on the bow, ready to shoot, with the inscription, "If any one touches me I will shoot him;" and the other which attributed to Vergil the origin of the famous *Bocca della Verità*, in the church of Santa Maria in Cosmedin, at Rome, an ancient circular drain-head, to the left in the portico, into the mouth of which, according to a mediaeval belief, the ancient Romans thrust their hand when taking the oath.

With the Renaissance Vergil returned to his own again, that is, the sane and sound love based on an appreciation of the spirit and perfect form of his works. Since then countless students of literature have loved and admired him. Scaliger preferred him even to Homer; Bacon calls him the "Chastest poet and the royalist that to the

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memory of man is known;" Leibnitz always had him in hand when at leisure, and read him so often, that in old age he could repeat whole books by heart. In our own day he was the dearest of all poets to the heart of Lord Tennyson, who, in his last sickness, would turn over his pages and fondle the book, and who has written the noblest tribute to him that can be found in any language:

Landscape lover, lord of language,
More than he that sang the Works and Days,
All the chosen coin of fancy,
Flashing out from many a golden phrase.

Thou that seest universal
Nature moved by universal mind;
Thou majestic in thy sadness,
At the doubtful doom of human kind;

I salute thee, Mantovano,
I that loved thee since my days began;
Wielder of the mightest measure,
Ever moulded by the lips of man.

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But perhaps the greatest homage ever paid by one writer to another, excepting the placing of Socrates in his *Dialogues* by Plato, is Dante's choice of Vergil as a guide in the journey through Hell and Purgatory. This choice was largely due, of course, to Vergil's position in popular legend as a prophet of the coming of Christ; but it was likewise dictated by intense personal love. Dante knew his works by heart, he calls him his master, him from whom he obtained the *bello stile* that brought him honor, his light, his guide, his more than father; and he clings to him constantly until that scene in the Earthly Paradise when Beatrice appears, and Dante, overwhelmed with emotion, turning around to seek consolation from Vergil, becomes aware that he had disappeared;

Ma Virgilio n'avea lasciati scemi
Di sè; Virgilio dolcissimo padre;

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Virgilio, a cui per mia salute die'mi;
Nè quantunque perdeo l'antica madre,
Valse alle guancie nette di rugiada,
Che, lagrimando, non tornasser adre.¹

A certain reaction against Vergil has taken place in the nineteenth century, especially in Germany, where Niebuhr, Bernhandy, and Teufel deny him all creative power, and Mommsen classes the *Aeneid* with the *Henriade* of Voltaire, and the *Messiah* of Klopstock. Yet in England and France, Vergil still retains his ancient popularity and reputation.

Of the modern writers, of course, not so much can be said as of the ancients. Time has been wanting, and the prestige of two thousand years or more has not left to them the mellow tint, to use the figure of Thoreau,

¹ But Virgil had bereaved us of himself;
Virgil, my best-beloved father; Virgil, he
To whom I gave me up for safety; nor
All, our prime mother lost, availed to save
My undewed cheeks from blur of soiling tears.
—*Purg.* xxx, 49 ff.

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that makes beautiful the works of the ancient poets, as well as their marbles. And yet even here an interesting anthology could be collected of the love men have felt for the modern poets. The influence of Shakspeare is almost universal to-day, and many a man can sympathize with Goethe, when he tells how, when reading the plays of the great dramatist, at night, in the solitude of his own room, it seemed as if a magician called up a host of figures around him, and he felt his existence "um unendlichkeit erweitert."

Perhaps of no great poet has so much literary cant been expressed as of Shakspeare, who has been extolled so universally, and so extravagantly that men have been afraid to mention even the most flagrant imperfections of this "great though negligent writer." The sane and sensible love for Shakspeare, who, according to the judgment of mankind is one of the three greatest world-poets, is well

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expressed by Ben Jonson: "Players mentioned as an honor to Shakspeare, that he never blotted out a line. My answer hath been; would that he had blotted out a thousand, which they thought a malevolent speech. I had not told posterity this, but for their ignorance, who choose that circumstance to commend their friend by, wherein he most faulted; and to justify mine own candor; for I loved the man and do honor his memory, on this side idolatry, as much as any." As a contrast to this loving, yet sober testimony, we may take Emerson's rhapsodic, almost mystical words: "No nation has produced anything like his equal," says he, "there is no quality in the human mind,—there is no class of topics in which he has not soared or descended, and none in which he has not said the commanding word. All men are impressed in proportion to their own advancement in thought, by the genius of Shakspeare,

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and the greatest mind values him most. It is the prerogative of this great man to stand at this hour foremost of all men in literary history, and so (shall we not say?) of all men, in the power to inspire. Virtue goes out of him into others."

There is no need of compiling an anthology of the words of praise spoken concerning Shakspeare; but a few remarks by celebrated men will serve to show the deep love and reverence he has inspired in the noblest minds. Milton cries out, concerning a monument to the poet:—

Dear son of memory, great heir of fame,
What need'st thou such weak witness of thy name?
Thou in our wonder and astonishment
Hast built thyself a lifelong monument;

and John Dryden, in an age of reaction against Shakspeare's fame, when Rymer could call *Othello*, " a bloody farce, without salt

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or savor," and Pepys could say that the *Tempest* had "no great wit," and that the *Midsummer Night's Dream* was "the most insipid and ridiculous play,"—Dryden could still write the loving lines, entitled to "*Sir Godfrey Kneller*," (who had given him in 1693, a copy of the Chandos portrait of Shakspeare) :—

Shakspeare, thy Gift, I place before my sight;
With awe, I ask his Blessing ere I write;
With Reverence look on his majestic Face;
Proud to be less, but of his Godlike Race.
His soul inspires me, while thy Praise I write,
And I like Teucer, under Ajax fight.

In our own day no one has celebrated the genius of this mightiest mind that nature ever produced more eloquently than Thomas Carlyle. "I think the best judgment, not of this country only, but of Europe at large is slowly pointing to the conclusion that Shakspeare is the chief of all poets hitherto;

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the greatest intellect who in our recorded world has left record of himself in the way of literature. On the whole I know not such a power of vision, such a faculty of thought, if we take all the character of it, in any other man. Such a calmness of depth; placid joyous strength; all things imaged in that great soul of his, so true and clear, as in a tranquil, unfathomable sea. . . . His works are so many windows, through which we see a glimpse of the world that was in him. Passages there are that come upon you like splendour out of heaven; bursts of radiance, illuminating the very heart of the thing; you say 'that is true, spoken once and forever; wheresoever and whensoever there is an open human soul, that will be recognized as true.' But call it worship, call it what you will, is it not a right glorious thing and set of things, this that Shakspeare has brought us? For myself, I feel that there is

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actually a kind of sacredness in the fact of such a man being sent into this earth. Is he not an eye to us all? A blessed heaven-sent Bringer of Light?"

But a still more impressive witness to the love and influence that can be inspired by a great poet, is shown in the last days, both of Carlyle and of Lord Tennyson. We are told how the old Carlyle would repeat over the lines of Macbeth:

To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow,
Creeps in this pretty pace from day to day,
To the last syllable of recorded time;
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
The way to dusty death;—out, out, brief candle!
Life's but a walking shadow; a poor player
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
And then is heard no more; it is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing.

And especially in the last days of his final

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illness he would murmur over and over the dirge in *Cymbeline*:—

Fear no more the heat o' the sun,
Nor the furious winter's rages;
Thou thy worldly task hast done,
Home art gone, and ta'en thy wages;
Golden lads and girls all must,
As chimney-sweepers come to dust.

Still more touching is the way in which Tennyson clung to Shakspeare as he approached the valley of death. He had always loved him, especially *Hamlet*, which he called the greatest creation in literature, *Lear*, *Cymbeline*, and *Troilus and Cressida*. "There are three repartees in Shakspeare," he said, "which always bring tears to my eyes from their simplicity. One in *King Lear* when Lear says to Cordelia, 'so young and so untender,' and Cordelia lovingly answers, 'so young, my Lord, and true;' the other in *Winter's Tale* when Florizel takes Per-

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dita's hand to lead her to the dance and says,

So turtles pair that never mean to part,

and the little Perdita answers, 'I'll swear
for 'em;' and the third in *Cymbeline*, when
Imogen, in tender rebuke, says to her husband,

Why did you throw your wedded love from you?
Think that you are upon a rock; and now
Throw me again.

and Posthumus does not ask forgiveness, but
answers, kissing her,

Hang there like fruit, my soul,
Till the tree die."

On Monday of the week Lord Tennyson died, he sent for his Shakspeare, and tried to read two or three lines, but had to let his son read them to him. On Tuesday noon he called out "Where is my Shakspeare? I must have my Shakspeare." Then

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he said, "I want the blinds up, I want to see the sky, and the light." On Wednesday, at two P. M., he again asked for his Shakspeare, and lay with his hand resting on it open, and tried to read it. His last food was taken at three-forty-five P. M., and he tried to read, but could not. He exclaimed "I have opened it,"—whether he referred to Shakspeare, opened by him at

Hang there like fruit, my soul,
Till the tree die,

which he always called among the tenderest lines in Shakspeare, or whether he referred to one of his last poems, *The Silent Opening of the Gate*. A beautiful testimony of the ruling passion of the book-lover, strong in death, and the power of a great poet to soothe the last hours of a dying man.¹

¹ Perhaps the best modern critical summary of Shakspeare's defects as well as his greatness, is that given by Sidney Lee: "In knowledge of human character, in wealth

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There is but little disagreement in the estimate of the world to-day as to the supreme rank to be accorded to Homer and Shakspeare. The same, however, is not true of other great poets, concerning whose right to a position beside Homer and Shakspeare, critics are divided in their opinions. This is the case with Milton. While everyone admires the sublimity of his genius, yet there is something so aloof from actual life, something so un-

of humor, in depth of passion, in fertility of fancy, and in soundness of judgment, he has no rival. It is true of him as of no other writer, that his language and versification adapt themselves to every phase of sentiment, and sound every note in the scale of felicity. Some defects are to be acknowledged, but they sink into insignificance, when measured by the magnitude of his accomplishment. His sudden transitions, elliptical expressions, mixed metaphors, indefensible verbal quibbles, and fantastic conceits at times create an atmosphere of obscurity. Some of his plots are hastily constructed and inconsistently developed; but the intensity of the interest with which he invests the personality of his heroes and heroines triumphs over halting or digressive treatment of the story. His unassailable supremacy springs from the versatile working of his insight and intellect, by virtue of which his pen limned with unerring precision, almost every gradation of thought and emotion that animates the living stage of the world. His genius enabled him to give being in his pages to all the shapes of humanity which present themselves on the highway of life."

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magnetic in Milton's own character, that, while men have admired him, but few have really loved him. His soul was indeed like a star and dwelt apart; he had

A voice whose sound was like the sea;
Pure as the naked heavens, majestic free;

but his genius strikes men as the majesty of the unclouded sky, filling them with awe and a sense of the sublime, but not touching their hearts to warm enthusiasm and love.

Many a profound truth is contained in an epigram, and the truth about Milton has been concisely stated by Charles Lamb, who, concerning Dr. Johnson's remark that the reading of *Paradise Lost* is a task which people perform once and are glad never to resume, cried out, "No! not a task, but a celestial pastime, to which the dullard mind is only equal at intervals." No lover of Milton has better expressed the deep benefit to

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be derived from him, in spite of his undoubted defects, than Frederick D. Maurice, "It is quite otherwise, I believe, when we receive it as the deepest, most complete utterance of a human spirit; when it comes forth as the final expression of a man who has been fighting a hard battle, who appears to have been worsted in the battle, who thinks he has fallen on evil days and evil tongues; whose eyes

rolled in vain

To find the piercing ray, and found no dawn,

who was cut off from all the joys of nature at the very time when he was persecuted by his fellow men. Hear in *Paradise Lost* the song of such a man, gathering up all the memories and experiences of the years through which he has passed, of the men with whom he had conversed, and of the books he had loved. Read it as the expres-

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sion of an unchanged and imperishable faith in the will of a Righteous Being, which disobedience cannot set at naught, against whom all the evil powers may strive but cannot prevail. . . . Read it thus and you will need no critics to tell you about its sublimity, or to classify it with books to which it has probably very little resemblance."

Something of the same thing may be said of Goethe. Universal as his mind is, summing up the whole aspirations of modern life, covering all fields of literary activity, yet somehow or other, possessing as he does the second universal characteristic of all great art, Truth, and lacking, as we cannot but feel, the first universal characteristic, that of infinite tenderness, which Ruskin declares to be the chief gift and inheritance of all truly great men, Goethe has failed to win the personal love of the great world of readers. Thus Emerson declares: "If we try Goethe

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by the ordinary canons of criticism, we should say that his thinking is of great altitude and all level, not a succession of summits, but a high Asiatic table-land. He has an eye constant to the facts of life, and that never pauses in its advance. But the great felicities, the miracles of poetry, he has never. It is all design with him, just thought and instructed expression, analogies, allusions, illustrations, which knowledge and correct thinking supply; but of Shakspeare and the transcendent muse, no syllable. He is the king of all scholars; let him have the praise of the love of truth. Life for him is prettier, easier, wiser, decenter, has a gem or two more on its robe; but its old external burden is not relieved, no drop of healthier blood flows in its veins. Let him pass. Humanity must wait for its physician still at the side of the road, and confess as this man goes out that they have served it better, who assured

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it out of the innocent hope in their hearts, that a physician will come, than this majestic artist, with all the treasures of art, of science, and the power to command."

It would hardly be in consonance with the purpose of a discussion of the "Love of Books," to dismiss Goethe with this judgment, which though containing a core of truth, is yet withal harsh and exaggerated. Goethe too has had his deeply enthusiastic admirers. John Stuart Blackie in the preface to his book on the *Wisdom of Goethe* writes: "In the present age I have found no name whose utterances have a better chance to be generally accepted than the great German poet-thinker Goethe. His wisdom is generally acknowledged, even by those who entertain the most unfavorable views of his character; and having, in my own personal experience, had reason to thank God, that, at an early period of my life, I became ac-

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quainted with the writings of this great man, it occurred to me that I could not do better service to the intelligent youth of this generation, than to lay before them his most significant dicta on the important problems of sound thinking and noble living."

Carlyle especially manifests in a number of places his love, reverence, and gratitude for the great German poet. In his *Heroes and Hero-Worship* he compares Goethe with Shakspeare: "His characters are like watches with dial plates of transparent crystal; they show you the hours like others, and the inward mechanism also is all visible." In a letter to John Murray, (1820), he writes: "I could tell you much about the new heaven and the new earth which a slight study of German literature has revealed to me." And again he declares, "That he who would learn to reconcile reverence with clearness, to deny and defy

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what is false, yet believe and worship what is true; amid raging faction bent on what is either altogether empty or has substance in it only for a day, which stormfully convulse and tear hither and thither a distracted, expiring system of society, to readjust himself aright; and working for the world and in the world, keep himself unspotted from the world—let him look here.” To Goethe himself Carlyle wrote:—“To you I owe the all-precious knowledge and experience that Reverence is still possible; that instead of conjecturing and denying, I can again believe and know;” while he ended the famous Edinburgh address by quoting from Goethe, of whom he says, “No clearer man, or nobler and grander intellect has lived in the world since Shakspeare left it,” the following lines of a poem, which he declares to be as deep as the foundations, as deep and high, as it is true and clear:

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But heard are the Voices,
Heard are the Sages,
The worlds and the ages;
Choose well; your choice is
Brief and yet endless.

Here eyes do regard you
In eternity's stillness;
Here all is fullness,
Ye brave, to reward you.
Work and despise not.

We have no time to linger over men like Molière, of whom Sainte-Beuve says, "to love him, I mean to love him sincerely and with all one's heart, is to have a guarantee in oneself against many defects, many eccentricities, *et vices d'esprit*;" or to linger over Schiller, whose essence is summed up by Eucken, who shows how the great German poet ennobled humanity by his art, and taught men to look on art, not as a luxury, but as a necessity, to counteract the downward drag of

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present civilization, to sustain the inwardness of our life in face of the ceaseless call made upon it by the outer world. Nor can we do more than mention the names of Spenser, of Wordsworth, Browning and Tennyson, all of whom have their devoted admirers and true lovers. We cannot omit to discuss to some extent, however, one of the most extraordinary examples of the power of a book, as well as one of the most recent, in any age or country,—that of Dante's *Divina Commedia*.

Not only was the great Italian poet born two thousand years after Homer, and twelve hundred after Vergil, but he was the object of bitter hate and persecution on the part of his native city during his lifetime, exiled from home and friends, under penalty of being burnt to death if he returned. Yet no sooner was he dead, than his greatness was recognized, even by those who had persecuted him most. No greater example has been recorded in his-

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tory of what a poem may do. It is true that we read of certain wretched Greeks, imprisoned in the quarries of Syracuse after the great battle between the Athenians and the Syracusans, (B. C. 413,¹) who were set at liberty because of their ability to declaim the verses of Euripides, and who, when they reached Greece, went and thanked the poet personally for what his words had done for them. But here is a poem that changed the whole course of feeling of its author's native land. Since that time Florence has made many efforts to obtain the body of the poet. Only a few years after his death, public courses of lectures were given by Boccaccio and others on the *Divina Commedia*. A hundred years later, Ciriaco of Ancona, a leading representative of archæological re-

¹ "The Syracusans sullied the glory of their triumph by huddling their prisoners into their stone-quarries,—a living death, dragged out, for some of them at least, to the space of 70 days."

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search, the Schliemann of the Renaissance, traced his learning, as Lowell has done in our own day, to his love for Dante. The study of the Florentine poet he says had led him to the study of Vergil, and this had led him to the study of Homer.

It is true that during the enthusiasm for the classics that marks the period of the Renaissance, Dante's prestige declined; also during the low-water mark of national and literary degradation which marks the seventeenth and eighteenth century in Italy, he was little more than a name; and especially was he unknown, or little understood, in other countries than his own.

We have already seen what Voltaire thought of him in the eighteenth century; while in England, Walpole compared Dante to a Methodist parson in Bedlam; Goldsmith says he spoke to barbarian people with methods adapted to their intelligence; and Walter

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Savage Landor considered the *Divine Comedy* the "most immoral and impious book ever written."

The power of Dante is not only remarkable in extent and depth and intensity, but also for the recency of his influence. It begins practically with the nineteenth century, and is connected with the great movement of Romanticism throughout Europe; and, in Italy itself, with the new patriotic movement which culminated, in 1870, in a United Italy. He was constantly read, studied and preached by such men as Mazzini, Foscolo and Manzoni. He became a symbol for all that was patriotic, the prophet seer of a new nation. And there was little need of the advice of Döllinger,—“Tell the Italian statesmen to study the *Divina Commedia*; at every crisis to regard it as the Romans did the Sibylline leaves;” for they did this from a natural instinct.

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The great poem became the object of enthusiastic study all over Europe. It was made known by the works of Witte in Germany, Scartazzini in Switzerland, Carlyle, Macaulay and Church in England; Longfellow, Lowell and Norton in America. In art it was represented by Reynolds, Watts, Burne-Jones, Rossetti, Ary Scheffer, Delatouche, and a score of others.

There is no more striking feature of this study of Dante than the intense personal affection which the Florentine poet has awakened in the hearts of his admirers. There is nothing like it, I think, in literature. Even Vergil, to whom Dante constantly refers as "master," "my more than father," was to him more of a symbol, a legendary figure, than a personal friend. Homer is too far back among the misty mountain-tops of antiquity to win our love, though he has our unbounded admiration; Shakspeare, vast,

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serene, is too impersonal; and the reading of Milton whose "soul is like a star and dwells apart," while it is a celestial pastime as Charles Lamb says, is something which the dullard mind is only equal to at rare intervals.

In the case of Dante, the man as the book wins, not only admiration, but love. "It is because they find in him a spur to noble aims," says Lowell, "a secure refuge in that defeat which the present day seems, that they prize Dante who know and love him best. He is not merely a great poet, but an influence, part of the soul's resources in time of trouble." Milman, in a letter to Longfellow, declares, "I have been from my youth up a worshiper of Dante;" Ruskin, who has introduced Dante so lavishly into his works, who has thrown so much illuminating light on the *Divina Commedia*, and whose admiration and love run the whole gamut of eulogistic statement, declares him to be "the cen-

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tral man of all the world, as representing in perfect balance the imaginative, moral, and intellectual faculties, all at their highest." Carlyle in one of his own outbursts of sombre eloquence, cries out "True souls in all generations of the world who look on this Dante will find a brotherhood in him; the deep sincerity of his thoughts, his woes and hopes, will speak likewise to their sincerity; they will feel that this Dante too, was once a brother;" while Gladstone, whose life-long study of Dante is well-known, wrote to Signor Guiliani;—"The reading of Dante is not merely a pleasure, a *tour de force*, or a lesson; it is a vigorous discipline for the heart, the intellect, the whole man. In the school of Dante I have learned a great part of that mental provision (however insignificant it may be) which has served me to make the journey of life up to the term of nearly seventy-three years."

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Time would fail us to quote what has been said by men of all nations about their love for Dante; how Carducci refused to have anything to do with the proposed monument to him because the poet's own glory was his best monument; how Schelling calls him the High-priest, "der im Allerheiligsten steht, wo Poesie and Religion eins sind;" how Dörlinger writes: "Dante is still now as ever, not only the martyr but the prophet, teacher, and guide of his countrymen. Well may the statesmen of that country, when the serious questions of life crop up, take counsel from his works;" how Auguste Comte used to regard the daily reading of a canto of the *Divina Commedia* as an almost essential element in the spiritual self-culture of his religion of humanity; how Longfellow, when crushed by the tragic death of his wife, found comfort in translating the *Divina Commedia*, and wrote his noble sonnets thereon, comparing it to a

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cathedral, and telling how he himself found peace and tranquillity therein. These six sonnets are probably the highest expression of Longfellow's poetic genius. The last sonnet well describes the ever-widening influence of the great Florentine, even in lands of different speech, different blood, and different creed:

O star of morning and of liberty!
O bringer of the light whose splendor shines
Above the darkness of the Apennines,
Forerunner of the day that is to be!
The voices of the city and the sea,
The voices of the mountains and the pines,
Repeat thy song till the familiar lines
Are foot-paths for the thought of Italy!
Thy fame is blown abroad from all the heights,
Through all the nations; and a sound is heard,
As of a mighty wind, and men devout,
Strangers of Rome, and the new proselytes,
In their own language hear thy wondrous word,
And many are amazed and many doubt.

Dean Church in his admirable essay sums up

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the reasons why so many of the world's best thinkers love so deeply the great Florentine poet: "Those who know the *Divina Commedia* best, will best know how hard it is to be the interpreter of such a mind; but they will sympathize with the wish to call attention to it. They know, and would wish others also to know, not by hearsay, but by experience, the power of that wonderful poem. They know its austere yet subduing beauty; they know what force there is in its free and earnest and solemn verse, to strengthen, to tranquillize, to console. It is a small thing that it has the secret of nature and man; that a few keen words have opened their eyes to new sights in earth and sea and sky; have taught them new mysteries of sound; have made them recognize, in distinct image or thought, fugitive feelings, or their unheeded expression, by look or gesture, or motion; that

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it has enriched the public and collective memory of society with new instances, never to be lost, of human feeling and fortune; has charmed ear and mind by the music of its stately march, and the variety and completeness of its plan. But, besides this, they know how often its seriousness has put to shame their trifling, its magnanimity their faintheartedness, its living energy their indolence, its stern and sad grandeur rebuked low thoughts, its thrilling tenderness overcome sullenness and assuaged distress, its strong faith quelled despair and soothed perplexity, its vast grasp imparted the sense of harmony to the view of clashing truths. They know how often they have found, in times of trouble, if not light, at least that deep sense of reality, permanent, though unseen, which is more than light can always give, in the view which it has suggested to them of the judgments and the love of God."

CHAPTER VI

THE ULTIMATE IDEALS AND THE REWARDS OF THE HIGHER READING

We have hitherto been speaking of none but the world's greatest writers; and even of these we have been obliged to leave out the mention of such men as Tasso, Ariosto, Victor Hugo, Alfred de Musset, Lamartine, Heine, Lessing, Wordsworth, Keats, Tennyson and Browning and a score of others. Many examples could be given of the enthusiastic love aroused by these men in the hearts of their devoted admirers.¹ And yet it

¹Thus for instance Ruskin says, "I am quite unable to say to what extent my thoughts have been guided by Wordsworth, Carlyle, and Helps, to whom (with Dante and George Herbert in olden time,) I owe more than to any other writers." Rather strangely, it might seem, Mark Twain conceived a great passion for Browning. "I was away at the time of his great Browning passion," says William Dean Howells, "and I know of it chiefly from hearsay; but at the time Tolstoy was doing what could be done to make me over, Clemens wrote, 'That man seems to have been to you what Browning was to me.'"

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is not altogether true that the best way of reading is to read only the few highest men of genius in the world's literature, as some have often insisted. Without doubt, every man ought to tie up to one, or two or three of the greatest poets, Homer, Shakspeare or Dante, to read them by day and night, learn the best passages by heart, and find an every ready companion and friend in them. But just as a man cannot live always on the mountain top of spiritual experience and centemplation, but must likewise mingle with the world, so it is not best for a man to ignore the whole field of lesser books. A man's library need not be large, and probably such collections as Lubbock's Hundred Best Books, and President Eliot's five foot shelf of books, will be enough for his constant use and reading.¹

¹ The original of these "Libraries," can be found in Don Ferrante's Library in Manzoni's *Promessi Sposi*. "He had a collection of books a little less than three hundred volumes, all select works, all books of the highest reputation in the various subjects, in each one of which he was more or less well versed."

Again it is undoubtedly true that a vast amount of energy and time is wasted on the inexhaustible stream of ephemeral literature, so characteristic of our times. This is true especially of the lighter form of novels, of which Lord Tennyson declares that to read them is like wading through a sea of glue. It is further true that it is the duty of every true lover of books to open the eyes of men, as far as lies in the power of each one, to the higher kind of reading, the perennial books, which feed the mind, and heart, and soul, and which never grow old. The benefit of this kind of reading has never been better described than by Frederic Harrison in his little volume on the *Choice of Books*: "It never occurs to men that such books have a daily and perpetual value, such as the devout Christian finds in his morning and evening Psalm; that the music of them has to sink into the soul by continuous renewal; that we have to live

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with them and in them, till their ideal world habitually surrounds us in the midst of the real world; that their great thoughts have to stir us daily anew, and their generous praise has to warm us hour by hour, just as we need each day to have our eyes filled by the light of heaven, and our blood warmed by the glow of the sun. I vow, when I see men, forgetful of the perennial poets of the world, muck-raking in a litter of fugitive refuse, I think of that wonderful scene in *Pilgrim's Progress*, where Interpreter shows the wayfarers an old man raking in the straw and dust, whilst he will not see the angel who offers him a crown of gold and precious stones."

Yet in spite of all this I cannot help feeling that there is a little exaggeration in such expressions as Ruskin's "I admit two orders of poets, but no third;" or Emerson's "I think I will never read any but the commonest books, the Bible, Dante, Homer, Shakspeare

and Milton.”¹ For just as the philosopher may sometimes learn from the humble mechanic, so the philosophic reader may get many an important fact, catch a glimpse of some new principle, some sudden insight or gleam of light from the humblest book. To fulfill the ultimate ideal of the art of reading, to see something of all time and all existence, the reader must indeed do more than read the few great masterpieces of the world’s literature. He must learn, like Emerson, sublime lessons from the very bulletins of the streets. Even newspapers, read in the right way, deepen our knowledge of life and the world, and many a brief paragraph of news has the same power to show us the infinite pathos, tragedy, beauty and sublimity of life, as the works of the greatest poets. So books of history, travel, science,

¹ Both Ruskin and Emerson are inconsistent in this respect, for both were not only deep readers, but wide readers as well.

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philosophy, religion, nay, even doctor's theses and the ephemeral pamphlet, may lend their ray of light, toward the deeper understanding of this strange existence of ours,—“this world which is so hard, this life which must end in death,”—and which are yet “rich in the beautiful and the strange.”

For after all, reading is like the development of the intellectual and spiritual life, to which it ministers in so large a measure; it is not a regular succession of upward steps, but a gradual disentanglement from the confusion that surrounds us, an emergence to a higher point of view, whence we may safely separate the true from the false, the essential from the unessential. And in the world of books, this later winnowing out, does not apply merely to whole books, but to parts of books, as well. As Emerson says, we must read not by the book-full, but by the chapter-full, and oftentimes a glance will suffice our

needs. This art of getting at the gist of a book was what especially characterized men like Hegel and Lord Macaulay, and surely we may learn from them the principle, higher and more sensible than that of leaving to one side all but the great books, of being able to get the grain of gold often contained in the humblest of books.

To accomplish this higher kind of reading, a man must give up many of what the world calls prizes,—wealth, ambition, social rank, political influence, the desire to be something among men. “He must embrace solitude as a bride. He must have his glees and his glooms alone. His own estimate must be measure enough, his own praise reward enough for him. And why must the student be solitary and silent? That he may become acquainted with his thoughts. If he pines in a lonely place, hankering for the crowd, for display, he is not in the lonely place; his heart is in the

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market; he does not see; he does not hear; he does not think. But go cherish your soul; expel companions; set your habits to a life of solitude; then will the faculties rise fair and full within, like forest trees and field flowers; you will have results, which when you meet your fellow-men, you can communicate, and they will gladly receive."¹

And the reward of this apparent self-denial is rich beyond all price. A quiet harmonious life,

Reaping rich harvest from the mellow soil,
Of quiet thought, the mother of great deeds;

a sense of uplift that comes from reading the infinite book of the world and

¹ Cf. Wordsworth: "It is an awful truth that there neither is, nor can be, any genuine enjoyment of poetry among nineteen out of twenty of those persons who live, or wish to live, in the broad light of the world; among those who either are, or are striving to make themselves, people of consideration in society. This is a truth, and an awful one, because to be incapable of a feeling for poetry, in my sense of the word, is to be without love of human nature and reverence for God."

life; a peace of mind untroubled by the petty cares and trials of life. Many are the testimonies given by world's noblest men to this reward of the studious life. "When we are harshly handled by fate," says Seneca, "we must seek refuge in the nobler sciences; they will heal our wounds and drive away all our sorrows." So Lucretius finds the only consolation of life in the reading of the great poets, and the knowledge of the truth, as it is shown by the ancient philosophers:

Sed nil dulcius est, bene quam munita tenere
 Edita doctrina sapientum templa serena,—
 Despicere unde queas alios, passimque videre,
 Errare, atque viam palantes quaerere vitae,
 Certare ingenio, contendere nobilitate,
 Noctes atque dies niti praestante labore
 Ad summas emergere opes, rerumque potiri.
 O miseras hominum mentes, O pectora caeca.¹

¹ But nothing is more welcome than to hold the lofty and serene positions well fortified by the learning of the wise, from which you may look down upon others, and see them wandering all abroad and going astray in

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And the same thought is expressed in the famous words known to all men,

Suave, mari magno, turbantibus æquora ventis,

nobly translated by Lord Bacon in his *Advancement of Learning*, and there applied to joys of the scholar's life:—"It is a view of delight to stand or walk upon the shore side, and to see the ship tossed with tempest upon the sea; or to be in a fortified tower, and to see two battles join upon a plain. But it is a pleasure incomparable, for the mind of man to be settled, landed, fortified on the certainty of truth; and from thence to descry and behold the errors, perturbations, labors, and wanderings up and down of other men."

Many pages could be filled with similar testimonies as to the uplifting power of the

their search for the path of life; see the contest among them of intellect, the rivalry of birth, the striving night and day with surpassing effort to struggle up to the summit of power and be masters of the world. O miserable minds of men! O blinded breasts!

true reading, testimonies given by ancients and moderns alike. We shall only quote one more testimony here,—that of Dante, an earnest student, a reader full of enthusiasm for the highest and best books, so persistent that he would spend the whole night over his books, and his eyes would become so dim that the stars seemed surrounded by a mist, when he looked up at them from his reading. Dante in the *Paradiso*, though an exile, in poverty, with a price upon his head, comparing his own sublime reflections on the nature of God, the world and man, cries out in the same spirit as Lucretius had done before:

O insensata cura dei mortali,
 Quanto son difettivi sillogismi
 Quei che ti fanno in basso batter l'ali!
 Chi dietro a iura, e chi ad aforismi
 Sen giva, e chi seguendo sacerdozio,
 E chi regnar per forza o per sofismi,
 E chi rubare, e chi civil negozio,

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Chi, nel diletto della carne involto,
S'affaticava, e chi si dava all' ozio;
Quando, da tutte queste cose sciolto,
Con Beatrice m' era suso in cielo
Cotanto gloriosamente accolto¹.

From all the above discussion it will be seen what is the real ultimate ideal of the love of books. Reading, then, is not to pass away an idle hour; not merely to get information; not to become a technical scholar alone; nay, not even to become acquainted alone with the best thoughts and the best sayings in literature; but to develop an ever-growing insight into the great mystery of life

¹ O fond anxiety of mortal men!
How vain and inconclusive arguments
Are those, which make thee beat thy wings below!
For statutes one, and one for aphorisms
Was hunting; this the priesthood followed; that
By force or sophistry sought to rule;
To rob, another; and another sought,
By civil business, health; one, moiling, lay
Tangled in net of sensual delight;
And one to witless indolence resigned;
What time, from all these empty things escaped
With Beatrice, I thus gloriously
Was raised aloft, and made the guest of heaven.

and the world; to catch more and more a vision of the progress of the world as it manifests itself in science, history, literature and religion, and especially its effect upon the human mind and heart. There is a very beautiful figure in *Le Vallon* of Lamartine, representing a traveller sitting down at the gates of the city at eventide, to breathe the fresh air a moment before entering:

Ainsi qu'un voyageur, qui, le cœur plein d'espoir,
S'assied, avant d'entrer, aux portes de la ville,
Et respire un moment l'air embaumé du soir.

So life, for the man who really loves books, is a long period to be devoted to the effort to know himself and to know the world, through the mediation of the world's literature. And when the evening of his life shall come, and he too sits for a while at the city gates, calm and quiet, and peradventure with his heart full of peace and hope, and

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casts his eyes back, not only over the long day of his own life, but over that longer day of the world's life, which his reading has enabled him to know, at least in part, this is the vision he shall see:

A vast chaos of spiral nebulae, pervading space; then the gradual, though not uniform, change of these into countless solar systems, each with its own attendant retinue of satellites. Of the more distant star-clusters he can form no idea, but he has a general conception of our own system with its planets, all different in shape, orbit and constitution, yet all revolving around the central point, where

Die Sonne tönt nach alter weise
Im Brüdersphären Wettgesang.

And then he sees our own earth taking definitely its present shape; the long period when it was a molten and fluid mass, the gradual cooling of the surface, the rise of mountains and spread of seas, the long suc-

cession of the geological ages; until at last, life, whence or how, who knows? appears on the breast of the green earth.

Then he sees the early prehistoric ages, the strange and luxuriant vegetation, and the monstrous fauna; until at last man himself appears, the lord of creation, standing erect, with his eyes turned to the stars, his mind capable, it may be, of understanding sometime all truth, and his heart stirred by mysterious spiritual influences flowing from all things.

He will see the wonderful spectacle of the history of humanity, the early savage races, nomadic and uncivilized, the gradual formation of civilized communities; then the course of history reveals itself to his gaze,—the development of the political life of Greece, the birth of liberty and government, the conquests of Alexander in the Orient, the early history of Rome, its gradual expansion, until

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the whole civilized world forms part of the Roman Empire. Then he sees, in the calm that spread through the world, the star in the East, the little stable at Bethlehem, the song of the angels in the sky, the shepherds kneeling at the cradle and the adoration of the Magi, the teaching of Christianity, its miraculous spread over all lands and among peoples. He sees the fall of the Roman Empire; the incursions of the northern Barbarians; and from the mingling of all these elements with Christianity, he sees the rise of modern nations. Then he sees the Dark Ages, the titanic contest between Pope and Emperor, Henry IV at Canossa, and Boniface VIII at Anagni. Then comes the Renaissance, the new birth of ancient civilization, and the beginning of modern civilization; then he sees the ever growing spirit of freedom, "slowly broadening down from precedent to precedent" in England, but dammed up in France by the

absolute monarchy under Louis XIV and Louis XV, and finally, overturning all barriers and covering all Europe with bloodshed.

And turning his eye backward for a moment, he will see to the west, another world, unknown to the ancients, far beyond the Ultima Thule and the Fortunate Isles, far over the watery waste of the great sea, unfurrowed by the keel of any vessel, deep in the heart of the setting sun, a vast continent, covered with mighty forests, traversed by lordly rivers, a land whose silence is unbroken save by the cry of savage beasts and the distant thunder of the surf along the solitary shores; then the adventurous keel of Columbus approaching the unknown shores, the Mayflower, and the Puritans, the early colonies, the Revolution, and the wonderful development of America of to-day.

But this is only the outer form of the

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vision. Our ideal reader will see the accumulation of facts which makes up the history of science, astronomy, chemistry, biology and the mysterious forces of electricity and radioactivity. Again, he will see the thoughts of man as to the world, the whence and the whither of his own life, the existence of God, and the immortality of the soul; the influence of Plato and Aristotle, the formation of the Stoic, Epicurean and Neo-Platonic schools; the slumber of Scholasticism, the new birth of Philosophy with Descarte's "cogito ergo sum,"—out of which, imbued with the still powerful influence of Plato and Rousseau, we have the modern systems of Kant, Fichte and Hegel. He will see the gradual development of the religious instinct, the naïve mythology of the ancients, the cosmic fables of the *Vedas*, the *Edda* and the *Iliad*; then the rise of a feeling for deeper personal religious experience, the mysteries of Greece, the coming

of Christ, the conquest of the world by Christianity, the extraordinary structure of the Roman hierarchy, its cathedrals, rituals, beautiful legends of saints, its ecclesiastical art, the passionate love for Christ by St. Bernard and St. Francis; then the Reformation, Luther climbing the Santa Scala at Rome, translating the Bible in the Wartburg, and crying out at the Diet of Worms, "Hier steh ich; Ich kann nicht anders; so hilfe mir Gott;" and finally the broadening out of religious worship, the rise and development of tolerance, the spirit of philanthropy, love and brotherhood, humanity itself gravitating towards "that blessed time when man shall grow more like to God through all the seasons of the golden year." And then he will look away from earth to the

heitere Regionen,
Wo die reinen Formen wohnen,

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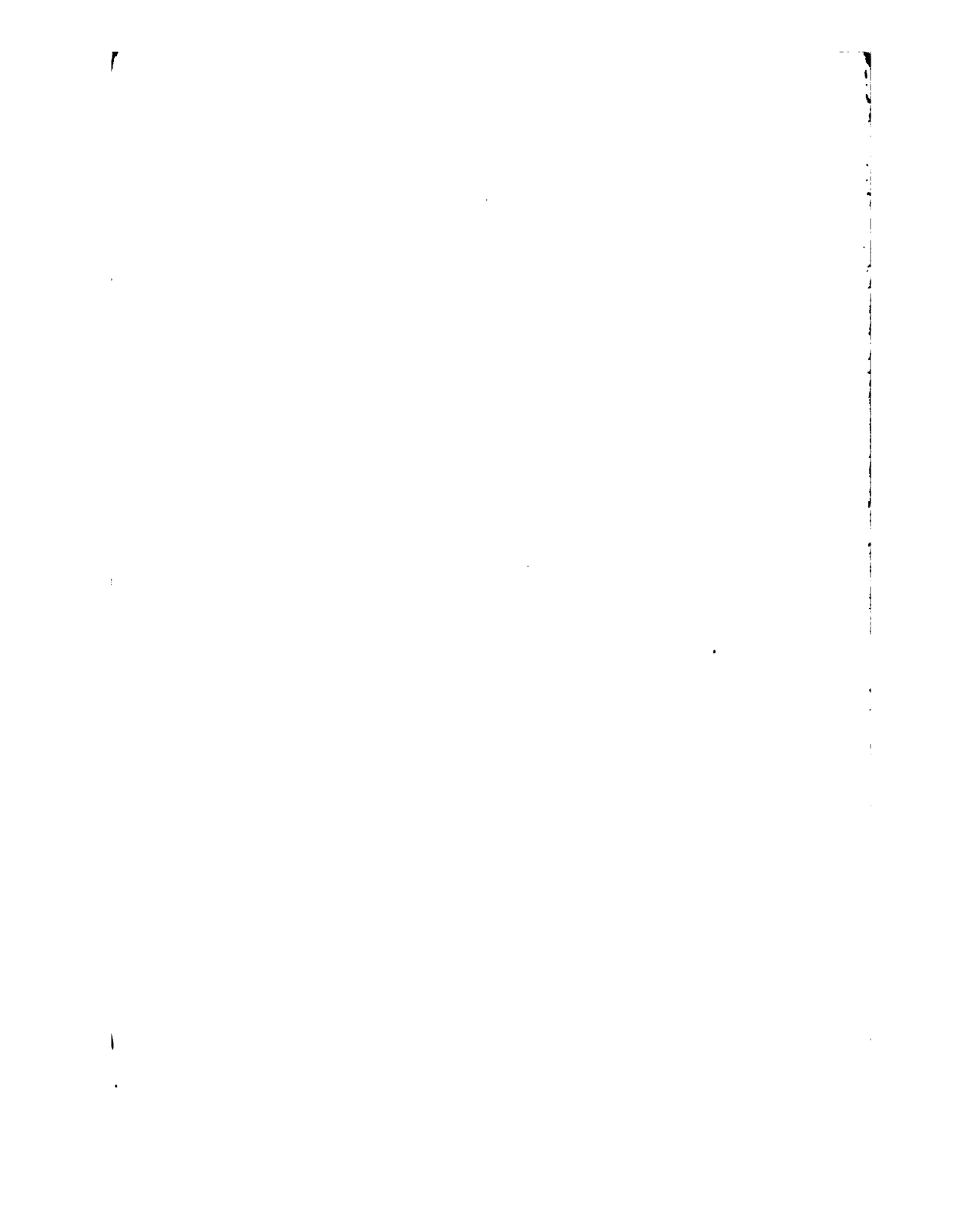
and with his imagination stirred by poet and prophet, and his heart filled with faith and hope, he may, perhaps, get a glimpse of that strange mysterious spiritual universe of which we know so little, and yet concerning which the mind of man has ever busied itself,—that perfect spiritual world, where “all broken fragments are made whole, all riddles solved, and all legitimate hopes satisfied.”

And so our ideal reader, like Berthold in Browning's *Colombe's Birthday*, will have had his “one great aim in life,

Like a guiding star above;

And,

Day by day, while shimmering grows shine,
And the faint circlet prophesies the orb,
He sees so much, as, just evolving these,
The stateliness, the wisdom and the strength,
To due completion, will suffice this life,
And lead him at his grandest to the grave.



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